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THE LION AND THE SNAKE

A Strategic View of South Africa and Zimbabwe

By Ralph Peters

Executive Summary:

Both South Africa and Zimbabwe face countless problems and daunting challenges, yet South Africa is a land of promise, while Zimbabwe is a grim failure. A decade ago, the situation appeared to be reversed, with South Africa bleeding from the tribal and political violence of Apartheid's death throes, while Zimbabwe was portrayed internationally as a model of inter-racial cooperation and post-colonial success. The world's focus on the urban turmoil south of the Limpopo River missed South Africa's deep potential and masked Zimbabwe's decline into one-man rule and widespread oppression. The contrast between the two states today is evident to even a casual visitor, with South Africa a land of unmistakable potential and Zimbabwe one of widespread destruction and despair.

To an unusual degree, this tale of success and failure in two neighboring countries is also the story of two men: Nelson Mandela, the most inspiring and admirable political figure produced by post-colonial Africa, and Robert Mugabe, a man who almost single-handedly has destroyed the economy and the social accord of the state that had perhaps the best chance of any of making an early success of independence. Mandela, a man whose treatment by the white regime would have given him plentiful excuses for a temper of retribution, proved greater of soul than any of his enemies and most of his comrades. We may not always like his criticism of us, but we would be craven not to admire his actions. Mugabe, by contrast, proved to be but another in a long line of African strongmen, speaking the language of socialism and liberation, but ruling through

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savagery, fear and division. Today, Mandela is revered as the father of free South Africa, while the people of Zimbabwe mockingly call Mugabe “Robodan Mugabevich.”

To understand these two countries and these two men, we have to clear our heads of various prejudices from both the political right and the left.

Both Mandela and Mugabe are the products not only of missionary schools (they even attended the same Methodist-run college, though at different times), but of systems of government which, however deformed they became, always retained roots in the rule of law. Those laws may have been unfair, they may have been twisted tortuously, and, in painful instances, ignored, but neither Apartheid South Africa nor Rhodesia ever succumbed to strongman rule or unbridled illegality. The inheritance of the English system of respect for law and the institutions left by the British empire were suborned by white supremacists, but never fully vanquished. The pre-liberation governments of both South Africa and Rhodesia felt the need to provide judicial cover for their racism, and in both systems the courts were never reduced to a mere rubber-stamp for a regime’s desires.

Likewise, censorship efforts never fully suffocated political discourse or the press. The old governments of South Africa and Rhodesia were cruel and even deadly—we can harbor no sympathy with them—but the distinctly British concepts (among empires) of constitutionality and elementary human rights were never extinguished. From his years of struggle and long imprisonment, Mandela took the lesson that the law must serve the governed, not the governors. From his own imprisonment and years as a revolutionary, Mugabe drew the opposite lesson that those who govern must control the law. Mandela reacted against one regime’s oppression by embracing a doctrine of freedom and humanity, while Mugabe imitated and expanded upon the actions of the regime that oppressed him, convinced that freedom was threatening and that humanity was a sign of weakness.

We ourselves must have the clarity of purpose to recognize that the British imperial legacy, despite the deep suffering in many of the colonies, left institutions, practices and beliefs on which newly-freed populations, from South Africa to India, could build rule-of-law democracies. Many of these states are America’s natural allies—although they may not yet realize it themselves.

No other European colonial power besides Britain left a similar legacy, and if hopes for an African renewal are to be realized anywhere, the likeliest states are those where the educated and professional classes speak English. The former French colonies, by contrast, are at the end of their viability in an age when a strongman’s rule can no longer master the economic and social requirements of the population. South Africa, especially, is the continent’s great human experiment. It has no counterpart in francophone Africa.

Mandela, Mugabe and their contemporaries in the long freedom struggle in southern Africa were also influenced by the rhetoric, arguments and methods espoused by Marxism in various forms, as well as by more benign, but equally ineffective, socialist doctrines. They were men of their age, of the late- and post-colonial eras, and for those involved in liberation struggles in the wake of the Second World War extreme left-wing rhetoric was a given.

Although accused of being a Communist by his enemies, Mandela never joined the party. He found some of its doctrines sympathetic, but remained suspicious of others. Mandela has, consistently, been characterized by an independence of mind rare among

human beings anywhere. A genuine visionary, he appears to have been able to think for himself—and to think creatively and humanely—whether in prison or in a presidential office. When considering the disproportionate number of Communists given cabinet positions in newly-freed South Africa, we need to look not only at the discretion with which those seats have been allotted, but at the minimal (sometimes positive) effects created. And we must consider the history of the anti-Apartheid struggle, in which the multi-racial South African Communist Party proved courageous and dedicated when the Western powers were still uninterested in the human, political or economic rights of black or even brown South Africans. By 2003, the Communist Party's share of the popular vote had diminished almost to the vanishing point—and its influence is much slighter than its visibility at the upper levels of government suggests. This is not an issue that should concern the United States to the least degree and any attention paid to it by our diplomats or policy-framers would be wasteful and counter-productive.

South Africa is a capitalist state in the essential spheres and socialist in the practical areas where such policies make sense. The government allows business to prosper and increasingly fosters entrepreneurship (post-independence white-flight has been reversed, with many emigrant South Africans returning after disappointments elsewhere). But the current government also builds houses, develops water and sewage systems and provides electricity at concessionary rates or purely at the government's expense (as in the program to provide clean water to villages). A purely capitalist system in South Africa today would leave most (black) South Africans with no hope—except violence. While the unemployment rate nationwide still hovers near sixty percent, anyone who insists that free-market capitalism is the only answer is a fool. Capitalism may be an ultimate goal, but, for underdeveloped societies, a mixed system—if the mix is the right one—has practical advantages, even if we do not like to admit it. At low stages of development, a certain degree of government planning and national programs provides the foundations of infrastructure that allow an economy to move toward fuller capitalism. And the contagious spirit of capitalism is very much in evidence among South Africans of every skin color.

But Communism is as dead in South Africa as it is in Poland. Mandela seems to have recognized intuitively that much of the Communist program would never work outside of the theoretical realm. His ability to finesse the African National Congress (ANC) rhetoric of revolutionary struggle into a functional hybrid state that is free-market as far as business is concerned makes him appear almost a magician. No other African leader has managed it. While South Africa still has the potential to make grievous errors, it now has a better chance at real, continual progress than any other state on the continent. It has vast reserves of human capital—and its number one challenge is to put ever more of that human capital to constructive use. South Africa isn't ready for Reagan. It's at the FDR stage.

Mandela, in his mid-eighties, sometimes reverts to the rhetoric of the romantic beliefs of his youth, when he did lean heavily leftward, and he occasionally criticizes the West or, specifically, the United States, as he did during the build-up to the war to depose Saddam Hussein. We need to take such pronouncements in stride. He is understandably frustrated by all that remains undone, by the enormity of the challenges still facing his country, and by the intermittent missteps of his successor, President Thabo Mbeki. His

criticisms of Washington amount to nothing more than minor flashes of temper, and we need to have the vision and the sense to pretend they were never uttered.

Mandela is also unique in that he is the one senior African leader from the revolutionary generation whose death would be a significant loss to his country. He remains a vital, unifying figure, a symbol of living moral authority without peer. He genuinely has been his country's indispensable man. But, elsewhere, African states will not have any meaningful chance of moving forward until the generations that waged the liberation struggle or ruled newly-independent states during the Cold War have died off. The leftwing rhetoric and strongman traditions embraced from the old East Bloc and tolerated by a West embarrassed by its colonial history will not simply disappear. Nor will all those younger Africans who profited from de facto dictatorships and rampant corruption eagerly embrace the rule of law and the popular will. But the aging men who won independence for their ill-designed states, or who ruled in the initial decades of statehood, have to go for the transition even to begin (as it has in Uganda and, one hopes, in Kenya and a few other states).

Robert Mugabe is a prime example of the breed that has to go. While Nelson Mandela was influenced more deeply by a British-values education, Mugabe (who was a good, even an obsessive student) found the doctrines and methods of the left, the rhetoric of black empowerment, and the strongman model of government more psychologically comfortable and more practically useful. Born into tribal royalty, Mandela became a man of the people. Mugabe became a man against the people—ultimately, even against his own long-favored Shona tribe.

Anyone who continues to subscribe to the last generation's leftist interpretation of history in which individuals make little difference, while social currents and economics decide all, has only to look at southern Africa to see the power a single man has to change history, for better or worse.

A combination of anecdote and statistics offers an accurate snapshot contrasting South Africa and Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, the government blames whites for every failure (even though the number of white citizens has fallen from about 200,000 to less than twenty thousand), while, in South Africa, blacks realized quickly that they could operate more profitably in cooperation with whites than by trying to impoverish or replace them. The black middle class (the business class) in South Africa has, in less than ten years, increased from about 3% of the total to about 15%—a number still disproportionately small, but growing exponentially. Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe, the middle class has been impoverished by a corrupt, economically-illiterate government. In the upscale Johannesburg suburb of Sandton, for example, the restaurants and outdoor cafes host tables of blacks, of whites and of coloreds (mixed-blood or Asian citizens). At the tables of the young, different races increasingly mingle. In Zimbabwe, whites are under siege and only regime cronies can afford to go to the dwindling number of restaurants that remain open.

At a time when Zimbabwe is losing its skilled workers (white and black), South Africa not only benefits from the return of whites who fled in fear of black majority rule, but also profits from a brain-drain from the rest of black Africa—skilled professionals who see better prospects in South Africa than in their own countries. While South Africa

also suffers from an influx of poor, unskilled economic migrants (not least from Zimbabwe), residents and aliens alike are guardedly hopeful about the future.

Even the famous slums of South Africa are misunderstood abroad. There is no substitute for actually visiting them, walking about, and speaking with people. The most famous “slum,” Soweto (short for South Western Townships) outside of Johannesburg, spreads over tens of square miles and contains dramatically different sub-communities. Some residential areas are solidly middle-class—or even upper-middle and upper-class. Most sub-communities consist of neatly kept, small worker bungalows, all with electricity and most with plumbing. Newer, squatter communities have been thrown up with scraps of corrugated iron or tin, but some already have settled into semi-permanence, with swept yards, planted vegetables, perhaps a few chickens, and government-serviced port-a-johns strategically placed (the most striking thing about the several slum settlements and houses this author visited in South Africa was the determined cleanliness within the houses and the struggle for dignity of the residents). The newest slums are often grim, even fetid, ramshackle affairs, built in low ground that floods—but even they are evidence of the magnetic draw of South Africa’s cities.

Despite unemployment rates estimated between twenty and sixty per cent (government estimates lower, NGOs higher) and some disillusionment after the initial euphoria of independence, most South Africans maintain some degree of faith in the future. And there is visible evidence of progress, from the upscale, black-owned houses the new migrant sees as he travels from his hovel to a job in Johannesburg to the new prosperity of black businessmen driving late-model cars or being served by white waiters in city restaurants. Indeed, the suburbs of the executive capital, Pretoria, are in the midst of a remarkable building boom and resemble upscale neighborhoods in southern California—right down to the bad taste and architectural excess.

In Zimbabwe, which even recently exported food to other African states, the seizure of white farms (along with frequent murders and other forms of violence) has thrown half a million black farm workers out of their jobs and left the country at the edge of starvation. In February, even as the Mugabe government tried to put the best possible face on things for the world cricket championship matches scheduled in Zimbabwe, the average resident of Harare’s “high-density suburbs” or slums, as well as many newly fallen from the black middle class, began to line up before dawn for basic foodstuffs, such as corn meal, sugar, cooking oil and bread. Drivers waited days in line in the hope of getting even a partial tank of gasoline. The Zimbabwe dollar continued to crash and even Libya, which had been supplying oil products in return for deeds of land and businesses in the country, had turned off the taps. But the regime’s favored sons zipped through the otherwise-empty streets in new Audis, BMWs, Mercedes and the occasional Lexus 4X4. Business was at a standstill, fear ruled, and it was common to encounter even the gainfully employed who had not eaten a bite since the day before. In South Africa, by contrast, there was no sign of starvation anywhere.

In a paradox, South Africa is an extremely violent society—the Zulu appetite for violence has now infected the country’s other tribes—that is ruled by law (South Africa is even more violent than Brazil and makes the United States look like a gigantic Quaker meeting house). The people of Zimbabwe are, by culture, much more passive, but are ruled by violence and often-savage oppression. At a time when South Africa’s major corporations are investing not only throughout Africa (where black South African

entrepreneurs are increasingly viewed as “imperialists”) but even in the United States, where South African Breweries recently bought the Miller brewing company, investors are fleeing Zimbabwe—once viewed as the region’s premier investment opportunity.

If the Pretoria government were able to get civic violence under better control, South Africa likely would see even more foreign-financed development than it already does (white South Africans joke about the frequent burglaries they suffer as “informal wealth redistribution”). Of course, a reduction in violence would require greater economic opportunities for the masses of the unemployed, which will take time. Indeed, black-on-black violence, with the world’s highest incidence of rape, is the great shame of South Africa today.

South Africa is a huge country with a population of 42-million and growing. Zimbabwe has a population of just under twelve million, with skilled workers fleeing. GDP per person in South Africa was \$ 3110 (in US dollars) in 2001; in Zimbabwe it was \$ 470 and it has been tumbling since then (unemployment in Zimbabwe exceeds 80%, according to Harare’s Daily News and each employed Zimbabwean supports a minimum of ten people). South Africa’s GDP in 2001 was \$ 131 billion and its foreign debt is 19% of GDP. Zimbabwe’s GDP was \$5.6 billion and has plummeted over the past two years—with foreign debt at 87% of GDP.

Despite painful social disparities, South Africa has surpassed Zimbabwe (once considered a jewel of British Africa) in virtually every category of quality of life and technological progress. South Africa has twenty times more televisions per hundred citizens as does Zimbabwe, six times as many phone lines, seven times as many mobile phone subscribers, and five times as many computers per capita—and in South Africa, the computers not only work but, increasingly, are connected to the internet. While education levels in the workforce are low in both countries, they are improving in South Africa, while declining in Zimbabwe (even so, the low skill levels, poor motivation and inefficient practices of much of South Africa’s workforce remain significant impediments to further development). South Africa has a largely first-world infrastructure, from superhighways to the power grid. Zimbabwe’s infrastructure is in collapse.

While the future may hold unpleasant surprises in South Africa, there is much cause for patient hope. Zimbabwe, however, is much like a vase that has been hurled against the wall—the destruction of its economy and infrastructure may be impossible to repair completely, even should a new, democratic government of national unity come to power in Harare. As the generations change, South Africa may prove a land of great opportunity—not least for the United States, which has the wealth, expertise, cultural affinities and even the racial complexion to cooperate constructively with South Africa in multiple spheres, from business through diplomacy. We will need to wait out the passing of those for whom anti-Americanism was a part of their revolutionary ethos, but we should be pursuing multiple forms of engagement in preparation for a closer future relationship.

Zimbabwe will remain on crutches, at best, for decades to come. The damage done has cut very deep, indeed.

And AIDS? The great scourge of Africa? At present it appears that AIDS is an unmitigated tragedy. Infection rates in Zimbabwe may be as high as sixty per cent of the adult population. In South Africa, the rate may be thirty per cent among blacks. Over a

million “AIDS orphans” are reported in South Africa, with many handed over to woefully inadequate orphanages that are unlikely to produce healthy, motivated citizens. In Zimbabwe, no trustworthy recent figures are available on those orphaned by AIDS.

A visitor easily could travel through South Africa or Zimbabwe without realizing the impact of AIDS, since the disease does not leave its evidence on the street in the form of corpses or the graphically afflicted. But if you go to the slums of Capetown on a Saturday afternoon, you will see large, colorful tents erected—often more than one per block—in front of the small workers’ cottages. Funerals are great affairs, socially important, and the small houses cannot contain the guests. So they hire tents. And business is better all the time for those involved professionally in funerals.

In the villages, you need to go into the sad, shabby little mission clinics to see young country girls lying helplessly, living skeletons draped with sagging flesh. Or speak to employers about the tolls on their trained staffs. Or simply listen to people speak about housemaids who turned out to be infected, or, in black neighborhoods, about lost family members.

Perhaps the greatest disservice Nelson Mandela did to South Africa was his failure to speak out forcefully about AIDS earlier in the crisis. Culturally, South Africa is a strongly sexual society with a prudish social façade. Sex may happen freely, but is not discussed publicly. The simple reluctance of authorities to warn of the dangers of multiple sexual partners, of frequenting prostitutes (a practice ingrained in black society by the generations-old practice of housing male industrial workers in barracks far from their families), or of not wearing condoms (scorned by a macho culture) led not only to the unbridled spread of the disease, but to the triumph of rumors, from those claiming AIDS is a white conspiracy or doesn’t really come from sexual contact, to the horrendous, but widespread belief that sex with a virgin cures AIDS—which has led to the brutal rape of countless underage girls, as well as to their consequent infection (this belief is also current in Zimbabwe).

Mandela’s successor, President Mbeki, compounded the problem by questioning the basic scientific data about AIDS, from the nature of the disease to the course it runs. No one has yet explained Mbeki’s astonishing denials regarding the causes of AIDS, but rumors—the coin of the realm in lands of informational poverty—claim that he cannot face up to the issue because he himself is HIV positive or, still more perniciously, that he and other ANC leaders see AIDS as a way to reduce the number of the poor and unemployed. At last, Mandela has spoken out on the problem, regretting his lack of engagement in the past, but for many millions it is already too late.

In Zimbabwe, AIDS has burned even more deeply into the population and even less has been done about it.

Yet, brutal as it may sound, we cannot accurately predict the future consequences of this epidemic. Horrendous in terms of human suffering and loss, great epidemics often have unexpected long-term results. The Black Death of the fourteenth century—the most savage and deadly epidemic in recorded history—killed between one-third and two-thirds of the European population. Yet, it also broke the feudal system by opening the cities to immigration from the countryside as urban areas sought to replenish their populations; it opened the restrictive guild (proto-union) system to new talent; led to skepticism about the existing order that would march through the Renaissance and Reformation into the modern world; and the plague even resulted in the beginnings of the tradition of

collective bargaining between employers and the employed. Anglo-American social values differ from those of continental Europe primarily because of the different manner in which English society responded to the bubonic plague. Politically, we are the children of the Black Death, the great leveller.

We certainly cannot assume that anything positive will come of the devastation wrought by AIDS in Africa—which will continue for decades—but we also need to beware easy assumptions and linear extrapolations from current circumstances. We do not know if the end-state Africa will be a better or worse Africa, but we can be reasonably certain that it will be a different Africa.

In this regard, the out-years are potentially more dangerous, but also more open to new possibilities than the present. Epidemics often have ignited fanatical religious movements (the power of African Christianity and sectarianism will be discussed in the body of this paper) and the persecution of minorities. But they also have opened societies to new opportunities and enhanced social mobility. At present, AIDS has behaved outside of common disease patterns in that it has disproportionately affected skilled workers (those with higher incomes and, therefore, greater access to sexual partners), and it is hard to see how the loss of skilled personnel throughout Africa could have any positive effect. Yet, we must beware snap judgements to the effect that “Africa is hopeless,” or “AIDS is going to devastate the continent” or “Africa has no future.”

Africa certainly has a future. The question is what kind of future it will be. Zimbabwe is a lingering twentieth-century model of a strong-man, one-party state that has destroyed instead of building. South Africa, a young democracy, faces so many challenges it would be easy to give up on it—yet is something new, worthy and even inspiring on a long-troubled continent: A truly multi-racial, rule-of-law, market economy with a social conscience. The United States of America long has been humanity’s great experiment in bettering the human condition. South Africa is the great experiment—and greatest hope—of its own continent. It may prove a bitter disappointment. But it is unquestionably in the interests of the United States for South Africa to succeed.

ZIMBABWE, LAND OF THE DOUBLE ECLIPSE

As we tracked white rhino through the reeds, my tracker paused to tell me, in a soft voice, “Our old people say that, when a land is visited by two eclipses of the sun, that land will know hunger. Two eclipses now, and the people are hungry.” I muttered something inconsequential and we thrashed on through the rushes, making a sufficient ruckus to avoid surprising any of the local fifteen-foot black mambas.

The guide was right about the hunger.

Starvation in Zimbabwe is a slow, deceptive, not-quite sort of affair. Few people have nothing at all to eat, for now. But what they have is inadequate. There are some vegetables, fruits and whatever can be gleaned or picked. But there are no carbohydrates, no bread or staple corn meal, and there is ever less meat and still less money to buy it.

Even those who can afford to buy the fruits and vegetables find themselves constantly hungry—and afflicted with digestive disorders. Instead of the blunt starvation of a great, high-velocity famine, such as those we have seen in the past in Bangladesh or Ethiopia, Zimbabwe's hunger, for now, manifests itself in listlessness and ill-health short of death.

But worse may lie ahead. The full effects of the seizure of five thousand white-owned farms over the past four years are only beginning to be felt. And Zimbabwe has been hit with a double whammy and an extra slap: First the seizure of productive farms, leaving them in ruins and unworked, then a drought that has stunted growth even on the small black holdings in much of the country, and, finally, an invasion of army worms that devastated an already-much-reduced maize crop.

Food aid is available to some degree, but it is misused. President Mugabe's cronies even joke about the famine, claiming that there is no need to worry about the consequences of the farm seizures, since the world community will only feel guilty and send food. And Mugabe's henchmen—no kinder word suits them—do their best to insure that the bulk of the food goes to active supporters of the ruling party, ZAPU-PF, and to those few towns and villages that voted for the party in recent elections. In Zimbabwe, as elsewhere under regimes led by strongmen, hunger is a weapon.

I was fortunate to visit Harare, the capital, during the cricket world cup matches, when the regime made sure that the few leading hotels had plenty of food on offer, if at exorbitant official rates--a cheese sandwich cost \$58 U.S. and a local beer \$18. The currency black market soon became appealing, since the official exchange rate was 55 to 1, while the streetcorner rate in Harare was 1500 to 1—meaning that, at the unofficial rate, that hotel cheese sandwich was a more-rational two dollars, U.S., and a Zambezi beer was less than a buck.

But the phony exchange rate had its purpose. Until the reserve bank ran out of foreign exchange, regime insiders were allowed to buy U.S. dollars at the official rate, then buy Zim dollars on the black market, then buy U.S. currency at the official rate again—a great way to finance a mansion, a Mercedes, and an offshore bank account overnight.

As for the image polishing Mugabe hoped the cricket matches would lend him, two key members of the Zimbabwe national team courageously used the games to protest what had been done to their country by the regime, while the international guests failed to materialize. Harare is empty of foreign visitors, yet the hotel at which I stayed laid out a grand evening buffet. When I entered the restaurant, the waiter and manager nearly begged me to order a la carte, which seemed odd, since the buffet was waiting and I was the only guest in sight. Then I got it: Whatever remained on the buffet would be divided between the staff of the hotel. Anything I didn't eat would feed a mouth in Mbare or one of the other black slums of Harare.

Breakfast was the same story.

It was a striking time to be in the city. In my hotel, the bellboy, delighted that I let him carry my bag, was all smiles.

"Are you having the good day, sir?" he asked.

"Yes. And are you having a good day?"

He paused, only briefly, still smiling and told me, "Oh, yes, sir. I am having the very good day. But it would be a better day if I had something to eat. Nothing since yesterday, you know..."

It wasn't a scam for a tip. The same sort of exchange happened again and again. Everywhere I went in the hot, dreary city, there were lines for food, lines hoping for food, lines formed up on a mere rumor of food.

From the "Kopje," a hill on the edge of the old city center, you may look east into a city of high-rise building, many built in the 1990s, when hope still prevailed against the evidence, and you can imagine you are looking at a moderately prosperous provincial capital. Then you notice the near-emptiness of the streets, and the lack of machine noise. If you look south from the hilltop, you see the beginning of the first "high-density" suburbs, the slums in which those lacking connections or prospects are crowded.

In one of those slums, there is a stadium. You can see it for yourself by watching the video of Paul Simon's magnificent "Graceland" concert of 1987. It's a heartbreaking film, if you know what lay ahead of that moment in the sun. In 1987, Zimbabwe had been independent for less than a decade and was regarded by the politically-correct, the ignorant and the marginally-interested around the world as a shining example of the new, free Africa. Despite the slaughter of thousands of members of the Ndebele tribe, traditional opponents of Mugabe's Shona tribe, and the torture, rape and dispossession of many thousands more—all by a special brigade of troops trained by North Koreans—the world was not interested in reports of atrocities from Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe was a hero of the liberation struggle, he had said the right words about reconciliation and tolerance, and the global media gave him a pass. So Paul Simon came to Harare for a celebration of music and the liberation struggle.

It was a brilliant concert. Despite the recent "excesses" in Matabeleland, even white South African students came north to listen, watch and dance, dreaming of new freedoms in their own country. It was, of course, a different time. While Zimbabwe seemed to be a land of hope, South Africa was still very much under the iron fist of the Apartheid regime. Mandela was still in prison. Exiled South African musicians dedicated one song after another to freeing him. If you were willing to overlook the murder of five or ten thousand black Zimbabweans by a black government as an unfortunate but unavoidable aftermath of a successful revolution, then you could believe that the future was dancing before your eyes, in a crowd of black and white. And if you didn't even know about the campaign of tribal murders, you might easily have become intoxicated by the vision.

In the mid-1980s, the stadium was in good repair and frequently used. Today, though still in use, it appears derelict and it is surrounded by slums that smell of despair. Despite South Africa's much greater level of casual violence, I was never the least bit on edge in any of the slums of Johannesburg or Capetown I visited. But in Harare, the looks my black companion and I got were different: Resentment...suspicion...hunger. There was a clear sense that I did not belong there—not because I was white, but because I was comparatively well-dressed and evidently well-fed. As we worked a car through market crowds, my companion grew increasingly nervous and the full-sentence English he spoke broke down into phrases. He, too, looked prosperous by comparison to the locals, although, in fact, he was not.

Buildings constructed as worker dormitories were in ruins, the "famous" market sold scraps and rags, the streets were filled with aimless men and children returning, listlessly, from school. An organized gang, Chipangano, unchecked by the police, did the ruling party's local dirtywork, extorted money from the remaining stalls in the market place,

crippled or killed regime opponents, and bullied young women and girls into sex. The gang was the only routine authority left in that slum.

Again and again, the people of Zimbabwe complain about the situation, about Mugabe, “Robodan Mugabevich,” but do little. Certainly, there is a brave opposition, much of which has coalesced around the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. There are strikes. And demonstrations. And the police crack heads and make arrests. But it never quite gels into a decisive confrontation. Although even members of the ruling elite are becoming disgruntled with Mugabe—or, more accurately, with what he is doing to the economy—the president controls the key levers of power. Although rumors of a settlement between the government and opposition surface now and again, the fact is that the entire country is waiting for one man to die.

Why don’t the people rise up?

The street wisdom in Zimbabwe is that the people simply are not violent by nature. Yet, Zimbabwean thugs have certainly proved to be able killers, descending on opposition villages, white farms, or the offices of opposition politicians. Rather, one suspects that Mugabe has realized a great and simple truth: revolutions are not made by the poor, but by the middle classes, and they are not made by the hungry, because the hungry are too worried about finding something to eat. The Mugabe government has “de-energized” the society. Resistance has yet to achieve critical mass.

Change may come, and it may come suddenly. One odd incident could trigger widespread violence. Such events are not fully predictable. Or Mugabe, who is 79 years old, could die any day—and there is no other figure of sufficient stature in the ZANU-PF government to get away with what Mugabe has. There could be a deal struck after his death, or violence could prove so alarming that the international community would feel compelled to intervene. But one thing is certain: When the change comes, it will not be easy to put Humpty-Dumpty back together.

The Black Aristocracy

If you stand on that hill in Harare and ignore the teeming slums to the southwest and, instead, look northward, you will see a great belt of green beyond the downtown, interrupted by the colored roofs of homes that range from middle class to mansion, with white walls showing amid the greenery. If you then drive northward, along one of the broad boulevards now renamed for famed African freedom fighters and heroes of independence, such as Samora Machel or Julius Nyerere, and if the roads near the well-guarded presidential compound are not blocked off, you enter a pleasant series of suburbs in which no one goes hungry, either because they are foreign diplomats, lingering business representatives, or connected to the regime. The cars remain few, but they are good cars and you sense that the drivers know where fuel is to be had. The parade of embassies reads like a “usual suspects” of terrorism, troublemakers and outcasts—Sudan, Libya, Iraq, Iran, the “Republic of Palestine,” the PRC, North Korea—but if you go still farther out you seem to be in another country, or in a fantasy world. There is even a handsome, sprawling new shopping mall—past a number of strip malls—and the

restaurants here are surprisingly well-supplied. If you don't mind the risk of trading currency on the black market, the prices are not excessive. And the shops are well-stocked to cater to the well-dressed sort, such as the gold-bedecked woman I saw getting out of a shining, silver Audi A-6. The security guards make certain that troublemakers do not wander about.

There are still good private schools for the children of the elite, and restaurants, and night-life, if you know where to go. While life in Zimbabwe involves misery for many, for those who have profited under the regime, and for the diplomatic community, it is merely a matter of inconveniences.

And what the shops in the north of Harare cannot supply, the elite buy on shopping trips to Johannesburg and Capetown—or to Europe. While the current dearth of hard currency has curtailed the sprees somewhat, it was common for Mugabe's second wife, Grace (who is as deeply hated as she is embarrassingly young) simply to drive to Harare's international airport—a gleaming, ghostly emptiness these days—and commandeer whatever Air Zimbabwe aircraft was on the apron. It did not matter where the flight was scheduled to go, it took Grace, or other top members of the regime and their spouses, wherever they felt like going that day. If a plane was full of passengers and ready to go, the passengers were simply marched off.

But such behavior was a minor affair compared to the feeding frenzy that occurred—and continues to occur—outside of Harare after the seizures of white farms began.

White Devils

Mugabe is fond of referring to Zimbabwe's dwindling white population (at under twenty thousand, less than a tenth of what it was) as “white devils.” Over the past several years, he has done his best to exorcise them.

As many as five thousand white-owned farms, large and small, have been seized in the name of fairness and justice. The initial wave of seizures was supposed to provide land to war veterans, with later seizures to benefit the landless poor. Previous attempts at land redistribution had been either very limited successes or outright failures. Whites had continued to control most of Zimbabwe's prime agricultural land—in a country known as the breadbasket of southern Africa—while blacks remained in possession largely of poor-quality tribal lands doled out to them generations before by the old, white-run regime. The situation right through the 1990s was undeniably skewed and inequitable.

What replaced it is worse.

I hired a bush plane to take me down to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second city. Now and then, a scheduled flight still manages to make the connection, if unpredictably, but I wanted to fly low over the prime agricultural real estate.

What I saw, from eight to twelve hundred feet up, was devastation: Untilled fields, withering plants, soil turning to dust from the lack of irrigation, looted homesteads—and no labor in the fields. In a matter of a few planting seasons, a rich agricultural country had been turned into a wasteland.

How did it happen? And why?

There is guilt on all sides and plenty of blame to go around. The white farmers played into Mugabe's hands. Their primary organization, the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) made some perfunctory attempts to design land redistribution programs—which the whites defend to this day as well-intended—but the conditions the CFU imposed on all proposals were so strict that little would have changed in the short-to-mid terms.

The white farmers were overconfident. They knew that they employed almost half a million blacks, while feeding the country and earning the bulk of Zimbabwe's export revenues. They had convinced themselves that they were essential to Zimbabwe's economic well-being. And they were right. But they did not reckon with Mugabe's willingness to destroy the economy to maintain his grip on power.

In fairness to the farmers, it must be noted that they were a varied group, with different levels of interest in training Zimbabwean managers or in turning over land to their tenants. Some did see the handwriting on the wall and engaged in local reforms—but their efforts did not help them in the end. Others were dead-enders. But there are a few myths prevalent in the West that need to be dispelled. First, not all of the farmers were old, die-hard, white landowners from the Ian Smith, white-Rhodesia era. A plurality, if not an outright majority, had actually purchased their farms from the new government after Salisbury became Harare. Many of the hardline whites had sold out and fled during or shortly after the transition to majority rule. Trusting whites from abroad and poorer whites within Zimbabwe applied what money they could muster and took out long-term loans to enable them to buy farms that were often modest, if not just plain hardscrabble. Some white farms were vast, dynastic ranches. Others were small, struggling and mired in debt. The image of rich whites relaxing on the verandah with white-jacketed black servants delivering pink gins rarely applied.

For the great majority of Zimbabwe's farmers, a great deal of hard work, planning and risk were involved. By American standards, many farmers would not have qualified as lower-middle class. Some were wealthy, at least in land. Others struggled to clear bush, construct irrigation systems, build dams and breed cattle—while always worrying if the bank loans would be paid on time and if the harvest would cover the year's debts.

None of this is meant to excuse a lopsided, unfair system; rather it is intended to make the point that the human equation was much more complex than brief newspaper reports or ideological stances allow.

The attitude of the white farmers toward their tenants, field hands and resident families varied. Some were, indeed, harsh. But the general tradition was paternalistic, with the farm wife often acting as an informal nurse and schoolmarm. It seems noteworthy that none of the recorded farm takeovers began with a tenant or worker revolt against the white owner. On the contrary, many black farm workers attempted to defend the farms against government-backed mobs, whether simply to protect their livelihoods or out of some feelings of loyalty.

The farm seizures were not by, or for the benefit of, farm workers or their families. And the ultimate beneficiaries have been powerful men and women with no interest in farming.

How did it begin? The farm seizures do not appear, initially, to have been part of a well-developed government plan. The first seizures may have been as spontaneous as they were claimed to be. Radicals, such as the self-named "Hitler" Hunzvi, played on the disappointment of a small number of genuine veterans of the liberation struggle who had

reaped no lasting rewards and on the discontent and availability of unemployed young males recruited from urban slums.

Hunzvi, a brilliant self-promoter, led a series of seizures then challenged the government and Mugabe to do more for the “veterans.” Confronted with a shameless self-promoter with good instincts for playing to the crowd, Mugabe recognized a kindred spirit. Instead of listening to the protests of the whites and the CFU, Mugabe declared open season on white-owned farmers, attacking the whites as colonialists and oppressors who were obstructing Zimbabwe’s development.

The seizures multiplied. And the leadership of ZAPU-PF knew a good thing when they saw it. Ever fewer actual veterans were involved, while hired mobs took over. Government officials or their wives would drive about, select a farm they wanted, then announce to the white owners that their farm had been seized for the people. If the whites resisted eviction, mobs of outsiders evicted them. Then, when the whites were gone, the police or the army evicted any black squatters who had taken the government’s promises seriously.

The new proprietors rarely had an interest in farming—or they expected farms to run themselves. They would come out for the weekend, hold barbecues (often butchering breeding cattle for the event), then return to Harare. Mugabe’s wife reportedly has at least four farms of her own, while the numbers in the possession of government ministers varies, according to which rumor you choose to believe. But the irrefutable fact is that poor blacks have not been the beneficiaries of the seizures. Some squatters are allowed to remain on the poorer farms, but they have no tools (either looted by the invading mobs or removed in time by alert farmers), no seed, no money, and no expertise—added to which dams have been wantonly polluted, irrigation systems destroyed, and cattle left to die in the fields.

Whites tried to resist, through confrontation and through the courts. Some were murdered (as were some of their black tenants). Those who tried to work through the legal system enjoyed repeated successes—on paper. Zimbabwe, for all its long decline, still has the remnants of an independent judiciary (and a feisty press, another British legacy), although Mugabe has maneuvered to pack the Supreme Court and has attempted to bribe, cajole, threaten or force lower-ranking judges into line.

Time and again, the courts ruled the land seizures unconstitutional. Faced with judicial rulings, Mugabe ignored every one.

The white reaction to the seizures fragmented, although the CFU maintained a façade of unity. Some whites—canny, despairing or both—wasted no time in selling off what they still could and moving to neighboring countries with their farm equipment and funds. States such as Mozambique and Zambia welcomed the well-known expertise the white farmers brought with them, and land was granted to them on especially favorable terms in Mozambique. Other whites stubbornly tried to hold on to what they could, hoping that reason would prevail, that Mugabe would lose power, that the government would realize the folly of its actions—but the situation continued to worsen.

Zimbabwe’s farmers (or ex-farmers) are a plucky bunch, with a rough-hewn version of the British sense of humor. Some, living in city homes—often with relatives—joke about being urban farmers, since they still own sheep or cattle that they’re grazing on other men’s farms. And they still do their best to behave as if normalcy may yet return. Many of those who remain are those who had balanced investments and homes in town.

In Bulawayo, for example, social life still centers around the old club, where the staff works to keep up appearances and Friday night at the bar is the stuff of legend. The pictures of the queen have long since come down, but the hardcore farmers regard the country as their home and insist they will not be intimidated into leaving. But their numbers continue to thin as the country goes hungry.

Robert Mao Mugabe?

Over the past two years, the campaign of land seizures in the countryside has taken on an urban face, as well. Gangs of “war veterans,” often in their teens but led by ZANU-PF operatives, have invaded, trashed or seized corporate property, businesses, aid supplies and the offices of private professionals and public officials deemed hostile to the regime. As of May, 2003, the government is trying to force out the elected mayor of Harare (the major cities consistently have been centers of resistance and Mugabe’s allocation of foodstuffs is intended to punish them). As in the land seizures, the police not only do not respond to calls for protection, but often simply look on as demonstrators or professionals are beaten. Repeatedly, the police and the army have transported Mugabe’s gangs of youths to seize property or attack peaceful protesters. The police have also made countless non-judicial arrests, as well as arresting opposition leaders (primarily MDC) on trumped-up charges.

At present, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, along with his number two, MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube and the MDC’s agriculture expert, Renson Gasela, are accused of attempting to overthrow the government and murder Mugabe. The case rests on a doctored videotape and the testimony of a single, almost unbelievably shady “consultant” who was in government pay and who attempted to set up the defendants by proposing they assassinate Mugabe. The state has refused to release details of known payments to their star witness and the trial has turned into something of a farce—though its consequences may be no laughing matter.

Embassies have been threatened by “the people” and accused of favoring the opposition, while NGOs operate on sufferance from day to day. International protests have protected embassies and consulates thus far, but Mugabe, at 79, has become less predictable than ever before and has encouraged a culture of lawlessness in the military (see below) and the police force. Although the people of Zimbabwe—black and white—hate Mugabe so thoroughly that they cannot see beyond him, his death or fall would be unlikely to bring a quick end to Zimbabwe’s turmoil. The ruling party has accumulated control of virtually all of the instruments of power, and the security forces have been privileged to a degree they do not wish to lose. Sooner or later, ZANU-PF will go, but it is unlikely to go gently, and post-Mugabe disorder may require international intervention to prevent a massacre.

At present, Mugabe has willingly destroyed the country’s agricultural base. He has discouraged the investors who initially had viewed Zimbabwe with unusual favor, resulting in corporate flight. The country has defaulted on all of its foreign debts. The professional classes—black and white—have been fleeing. The loss of medical personnel is especially grave, given the extent of the AIDS epidemic, but doctors and

nurses wearied of hospital invasions, the lack of supplies, unpaid salaries and deteriorating conditions. Harare's new hi-rise office buildings are most notable for their lack of activity. Vast tracts of the country reportedly have been sold off to Libya and other radical states. Now Chinese "experts" are being imported to re-start agricultural production along collective lines.

Even allowing for Mugabe's insatiable appetite for power, how could he have fostered policies that led to the thorough destruction of his economic base?

The recent arrival of the Chinese is no accident. What Mugabe appears to have attempted—not always coherently—has been to repeat Mao's Cultural Revolution in Zimbabwe, remade for African conditions. He has unleashed uneducated, unemployed masses of urban youths on campaigns of destruction in the belief that the old order could never be fully controlled and needed to be destroyed. Whether rival power appeared to reside in white farmers, a black opposition, the domestic business community or with international corporations, Mugabe has moved to shatter their influence. Although himself a well-educated man, he relies upon the discontents and appetites of the uneducated as shock troops. Even within his government, he has moved to tame the judiciary and to build a web of corruption that so thoroughly implicates all those around him that they realize their situations would be threatened immediately, were Mugabe and his party to fall from power.

On one hand, this Zimbabwean "cultural revolution" is about raw might. But this observer suspects there is also an ideological component to it. Early on, Mugabe became a hardline leftist. In the early days of independence he spoke in conciliatory tones (although his actions often belied his words) and he seemed content to let business generate wealth for the country. But several things negative influences came together by the late 1990s.

First, the electorate increasingly turned against him, requiring government violence and vote-rigging on an ever-increasing scale for ZANU-PF to be able even to pretend to have won elections. The "ingratitude" of the people infuriated Mugabe, according to insider accounts. He grew ever more impatient with the trappings of parliamentary democracy and the separation of powers inherited from the British system (already corrupted by the renegade Rhodesian regime that preceded majority rule). Although the white regime of Ian Smith had been overthrown through negotiations and under strong international pressure—and not at the barrel of a gun—Mugabe felt that the years of violent struggle had somehow entitled him to rule without restrictions (although he was a diplomatic, not a battlefield, warrior). He felt an ungrateful people had not given him his due homage.

Second, Mugabe long had been drawn to and nurtured by the Chinese and North Korean models of Communism, rather than any European variants. He is, by nature, an authoritarian, if not a totalitarian. During the liberation struggle, much of his own effort was devoted to ridding his movement of rivals for the leadership and he brought as least as much tenacity and ruthlessness to deposing other leading "freedom fighters" as he brought to the struggle against the Rhodesian government. He always resented his main rival, the Ndebele Joshua Nkomo (Mugabe is a Shona), but was forced by other African leaders to reach an accommodation with him in the period leading up to the Lancaster House negotiations in London that drew the roadmap for the transition to majority rule.

Once in power, Mugabe moved relentlessly and artfully to reduce Nkomo's authority, unleashing the *Gukurahundi*, the "sweeping away of the trash," a wave of ferocious violence against the Ndebele and other residents of Matabeleland in the southwest. He used shocking violence to break Nkomo's power bases, using, as his excuse, trumped up charges that the Ndebele were hoarding arms to overthrow the government. Thousands died, while tens of thousands were beaten, raped, robbed or dispossessed. The level of violence and cruelty far exceeded anything perpetrated by the vanquished Rhodesian regime, but, in the euphoria over "liberation," the world turned its eyes away—Mugabe was the darling of the moment and could do no wrong. The few press reports that were filed were determinedly ignored.

The unit that executed the campaign against the Ndebele was 5 Brigade, a newly-formed organization trained by North Koreans to serve not the government overall, but specifically ZANU-PF. The shock of the brigade's behavior when it descended on a village literally struck terror into the surrounding area. Residents were shot on flimsy accusations—Ndebele veterans of the liberation struggle were especially singled out—and an occupation might last days, with tortures, exhortations, forced public rallies, drumhead trials, humiliations, rapes... followed by the destruction of crops and imposed starvation. Far from the suppression of an incipient insurrection, the goal was the destruction of a people's will to resist. It was, in a sense, the forerunner of Mugabe's nationwide campaigns against all other competing sources of power in recent years.

Mugabe's destruction of the economy has not been the result of a careful master plan, but a combination of old prejudices and political convictions re-emerging in an aging leader, of seized opportunities, and of increasing paranoia. In a sense, he has reverted to the heady notions of his decisive middle years, when Chinese agents played an active role in African liberation struggles and Mao's leveling of Chinese culture served as an inspiration. Or to paraphrase a notorious line from a very different war, Mugabe seems to believe that he must destroy Zimbabwe in order to save it—at least to save it for himself.

We cannot know the inner divisions of the man, how much is sheer megalomania and how much a misshapen conviction of how to govern born of Chinese Communist rhetoric from a failed interval in China's own modern history, all mixed up with misunderstood examples, anti-white hatred, reawakened notions of anti-imperialism, and wounded vanity. Mugabe is neither a simple nor a simple-minded man. Educated initially by Jesuits, (later, by other missionary institutions, as well) he always has played political chess against opponents (such as Nkomo) who played checkers. The sole judgement that can be dismissed as inherently wrong would be the suggestion that the destruction of Zimbabwe's economy and social fabric has simply been a mistake on Mugabe's part. Often ad hoc, yes—but not a simple case of error. The world—and certainly Zimbabwe's neighbors—stands by as one man destroys the once-bright hopes and potential of an entire state. If there is any example in the world today of how broken, insufficient and ineffectual the international order has become, it has been the abandonment of the people of Zimbabwe to Robert Mugabe's will.

The Brother's Keepers

The people of Zimbabwe feel abandoned by their neighbors—especially by South Africa. Despite the widespread (and unnecessary) suffering within the country, other African heads of state and their governments have been unwilling to level serious criticisms against Mugabe and have been even less willing to undertake any actions that might restrain Zimbabwe's breakdown. Zimbabweans look at South Africa's inaction and listen to its silence and feel betrayed. They feel that they supported South Africa's freedom struggle, but now have been written off to please one bitter old man.

Nelson Mandela, especially, has been a disappointment to Zimbabweans. The one thing Mugabe has done for the unity of Zimbabwe has been to impoverish the people so severely that his own tribe, the Shona, are now as hungry as the Ndebele, Kalanga and others. An honest, open election held today would turn Mugabe and his party out of power nation-wide, and it's no secret throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, Mandela, as well as the current South African president, Thabo Mbeki and other leaders of their own freedom struggle, adamantly refuse to criticize Mugabe. Some members of South Africa's leading party, the African National Congress (ANC), with its own roots in Africa's longest struggle for freedom, have even declared publicly that nothing will ever make them criticize another black African leader—or Mugabe in particular.

As the British Commonwealth, in which the newly-independent Zimbabwe had been reinstated as a member (after Rhodesia's exclusion) attempted to deal with the problem of Mugabe and Zimbabwe by imposing trade sanctions, Africans resisted. Although some sanctions were imposed, the recent review by the Commonwealth-appointed troika of Prime Minister John Howard of Australia, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa led to a divided vote. Citing the gross human rights and legal violations of the Mugabe regime, Howard wanted sanctions renewed and extended. Mbeki and Obasanjo resisted, arguing, against the public evidence, that the situation in Zimbabwe had begun to improve. The people of Zimbabwe were outraged.

As an aside, one of the most foolish diplomatic maneuvers of recent times occurred in March, 2003, during the build-up to the recent American campaign in Iraq. Intoxicated by the acclaim he had received from parts of the developing world for "standing up to America," President Chirac of France argued for and won an exception to the European Union's travel ban on Zimbabwe's senior officials so that Robert Mugabe, an English speaker, could attend a meeting of francophone African states in Paris. Utterly misjudging both his own power and the situation in Zimbabwe, Chirac was trying to make inroads into anglophone Africa by welcoming Mugabe after he had become an outcast in the British Commonwealth. While the invitation delighted Mugabe, it infuriated the people of Zimbabwe. I was in Harare and Bulawayo during Mugabe's visit to the conference and the attitude of Zimbabweans toward the French was far more angry and intense than anything felt in the United States toward Paris. Far from winning an ally, Chirac has insured that the Zimbabwe of tomorrow will not welcome France as a partner.

Returning to the issue of African—and specifically South African—reluctance to criticize Zimbabwe, there appear to be several roots to the problem:

--Today's generation of sub-Saharan African leaders are either themselves veterans of the continent's freedom struggles or the immediate successors of the hardcore veterans. It is a generation still imprisoned by an us-vs.-them mentality vis-à-vis the West, and public anti-imperialism remains fashionable, if usually less rabid than in the past. None of these men or women want to break ranks with their revolutionary brethren (even when they personally detest them, as both Mandela and Mbeki reportedly detest Mugabe) and appear to hand a moral victory to the former colonial powers or the United States ("We told you so..."). They will go to great lengths to maintain solidarity against outsiders and, tragically, will overlook extreme human rights violations and governmental folly to maintain a façade of African unity. Indeed, the West cannot make satisfactory progress in assisting or working with African states until these generations of leaders pass from the scene, taking their Cold-War-era, freedom-struggle prejudices and notions of governance with them (see below). There is a deep, we-were-in-the-struggle-together loyalty that overrules not only common sense, but elementary human decency. Mandela, especially, has been a disappointment, given the literal wonders he worked in South Africa itself.

--African leaders do not want to provide non-African powers any excuse for intervention in African affairs, no matter how badly it may be needed or how incapable African countries are of doing the necessary work themselves. A strict prohibition on involving external powers in African affairs prevails. In a perverse sense, colonial regimes may be gone, but African leaders continue to place their faith in the most dysfunctional rules of European-style diplomacy, such as the absolute sovereignty of borders, no matter the crimes committed within them, and the right-to-rule of heads of state, no matter how underhanded or bloody their means of coming to power may have been. In fact, when intra-Africa interventions occur, they tend to be for the purpose of propping up a collapsing or threatened regime, rather than for improving conditions for the general population. Africa has, for now, chosen a false, superficial unity that prevents the emergence of a deeper, more humane unity of purpose.

--In the case of South Africa, the government's strategists have simply called the situation wrong, focusing on short-term dangers rather than the much greater long-term risks. South Africa already has a serious problem with economic and political migrants from neighboring states and Pretoria fears that, were Mugabe to fall, the chaos that would follow in Zimbabwe would severely aggravate the flow of refugees across the Limpopo. What the analysts miss, however, is that every day that Mugabe remains in power, with the situation worsening, the danger of civil strife and chaos increases when he does fall or die. South Africa views support of Mugabe as a containment policy, when, in fact, their stance only increases the pressure within Zimbabwe and intensifies the ultimate force of the reaction that inevitably will come. And the bitterness of the people of Zimbabwe should not be underestimated, either. They feel wronged. In May, 2003, three African presidents (Mbeki, Obasanjo and Bakili Muluzi of Malawi) traveled to Harare to "confer" with Mugabe. The hopes of the people soared and rumors spread that they would ask Mugabe to step aside. In fact, nothing of the sort happened, no progress was made, and Mugabe was, once again, treated as a full partner. To quote Harare's leading opposition paper, the courageous Daily News from May 7th, another opportunity had been

squandered, “all because Mbeki and company would rather have solidarity with the aging dictator than with the long-suffering masses of Zimbabwe.”

Even South African churchmen have pandered to the regime—while the leading clerics of Zimbabwe have sided with the resistance and the MDC, doing their best to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and to help feed the people. During South Africa’s own freedom struggle, churches in Soweto, Capetown and elsewhere were refuges for the liberation movement. But all that appears forgotten. One delegation of high-ranking South African clerics visited Harare in the late winter of 2003 to meet with Zimbabwean government officials and pointedly avoided Zimbabwe’s religious leaders during their stay.

The informal motto of this generation of African leaders, good, bad or indifferent, appears to be, “My fellow ruler, right or wrong.”

Intervention in Zaire and the Army’s Corruption

If you fly into Zimbabwe’s international airport, the drive into the city takes you past the 1 Commando Regiment, strategically positioned to protect the airport and secure the road between Harare and the terminal. In most developing countries, one would assume that the garrison is positioned to defend the airport against an invader. In Zimbabwe, the assumption should be that the commandos are in place to secure the road and the airport should Mugabe need to flee the country.

If you drive to the other side of the city, where the well-to-do have their homes, you will find other garrisons positioned to defend the approaches to the presidential residence—or to move quickly into the city center to suppress an insurrection. The presidential compound itself is thoroughly protected—and the nearby boulevard is blocked off during hours of darkness. In Harare and throughout the country, Zimbabwe’s military is not positioned primarily to protect the country’s borders, but to defend the regime against its own people.

In other developing countries ruled by a hated despot who has impoverished his society, one might expect a military coup (and such an action is not beyond all possibility in Zimbabwe), but the likelihood is lower in Harare than elsewhere because Mugabe has done a very good job of rewarding—and corrupting—the military leadership down through the chain of command, while carefully implicating the military in the regime’s worst crimes. Mugabe is certainly clever enough to have pointed out to the generals, colonels and their subordinates that any military junta in Zimbabwe would not enjoy the support of neighboring regimes—and would be an invitation to the international community to intervene, especially given the stains on the military’s record.

Domestically, Mugabe has rewarded military officers with farms seized from whites, with import concessions, with special currency trading privileges, houses, cars and plenty of lesser bribes. The air force, while it barely flies, has been used in farm seizures on the ground, and high-ranking air force officers have been especially active in the “Third

Chimurenga,” Mugabe’s cultural revolution that targeted first white farmers, then black tenants and squatters, then the urban middle and business classes.

But the real demoralization (demoralization in the sense, literally, of eliminating morals) of Zimbabwe’s military came during the intervention in Zaire in the 1990s, after post-genocide Rwanda emerged as Central Africa’s new Sparta and invaded eastern Zaire (now Congo once again) along with its Ugandan allies, intent on eliminating the threat from Hutu militias and, ultimately, on bringing down the Kinshasa regime. At various stages, troops were also involved from Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and other African states, ostensibly to keep order and give the new regime in Kinshasa protection against “aggressors.” The interventions quickly degenerated into looting free-for-alls and, in some instances, local massacres. The situation in Congo remains disordered to the time of this writing.

Of all the forces that intervened, the contingent with the clearest goals was the force sent from Zimbabwe. While domestic critics were baffled by Mugabe’s determination to further impoverish their country by intervening in a war perceived as distant and irrelevant to their situation, they failed to understand Mugabe’s deeper intent. He had no interest in marching north to confront the Rwandans, or even in protecting the Kabila regime (old or new). Mugabe sent his troops into the mineral-rich, gemstone-laden south of the vast country and promptly established a lucrative smuggling business. Diamonds, ore, precious metals—Mugabe raked in the revenue, but he also looked the other way as military officers enriched themselves (in the case of ranking officers, he encouraged them).

Intelligent though he is, the one characteristic Mugabe definitely shares with Mao and his generation of Asian Communists is the inability to understand economic issues. Mugabe’s assumption seems to have been that he could afford to break the white farmers and the country’s agricultural base (incidentally killing off a very promising tourist industry in a game- and scenery-rich country), as well as to cheat international businessmen on their agreements and even to default on Zimbabwe’s foreign debts. He thought he could do this because he believed he could amass off-setting wealth in his own hands, further concentrating power.

Interestingly, in a country reliant on agriculture as the bedrock of its economy, Mugabe never seems to have made an effort to understand the complexity of commercial farming—or, for that matter, the dynamics of any sort of commerce. Apart from methods of political and social control, the one aspect of Marxism that truly seems to have stayed with him is its simplistic and wildly-wrong analysis of market-based economic systems and the means of generating wealth. A brilliant political in-fighter, one suspects Mugabe would have failed at running a corner grocery store.

Of course, no figures or even convincing estimates are available as to how much wealth the looting of southern Congo over a period of several years generated for Mugabe and his henchmen, but it does not seem to have been enough to keep Zimbabwe afloat. Doubtless, a great deal of the money generated is hidden in foreign accounts. But Mugabe has given numerous signs over the past half year that he knows that he miscalculated economically, from tasking government ministers to invite some white farmers back from their new homes abroad to teach Zimbabweans how to run the farms that had been seized from them (the farmers unanimously refused, and not in gentle terms) to the near-desperation with which the government has been seeking oil products

by offering vast tracts of lands and generous concessions to some of the world's least attractive states (not least, Libya). Inviting in Chinese agricultural experts, too, indicates a sense of failure.

But none of this has convinced Mugabe to change his essential course. He continues to insist, after the utterly-corrupt presidential election of 2002, that he intends to serve out his full term until 2008, and he continues to use the full force of the government to keep the opposition on the defensive. If Mugabe resembles any of the East European leaders who fell in 1989, it is Nicolae Ceaucescu. Despite the webs of loyalty, complicity and indebtedness he has woven about him, one scenario for his fall could show a great similarity to events in Romania. From the corruption of the state and its organs, to the impoverishment of the country, from the Chinese "card" to the grandiose notions of personal power, Mugabe looks like Ceaucescu when you hold up the mirror. And, like Ceaucescu, he once was a darling of the West.

Robert, darling...

At the time of Paul Simon's "Graceland" concert in Harare in 1987, Robert Mugabe cut a heroic figure on the world stage. He had been given a pass on 5 Brigade's murderous behavior in the country's southwest, either because outside observers refused to accept the evidence or because they excused it as unfortunate, but an expected by-product of the difficult transition to minority rule. Not only leftists, but those in the political middle, in Europe and North America, maintained a positive, even heroic view of Mugabe.

He was even regarded as charming.

In childhood, Mugabe had always been the prize student in the white-run mission schools he attended, and the teachers remembered him fondly as a diligent student, extremely bright, and usually the youngest and smallest boy in the class. His early aspiration was to be a teacher and, as a young man, he went to Ghana to work. At the time, Ghana was in the euphoria of independence and under the spell of Kwame Nkrumah, a man of great dreams, elevated rhetoric and sadly little practical capability to manage a country that was (as Zimbabwe would be) among the most promising in Africa, given its level of development and its potential. Mugabe was inspired, but still clung to his intention of pursuing a teaching career. While in Ghana, he met a fellow teacher, Sally Heyfron, who would become his first wife and companion in his years of struggle. He might even have remained in Ghana, had it not been for an almost incidental trip back to Rhodesia.

What occurred during that visit home still is not completely clear, but Mugabe was drawn irrevocably into the revolutionary movement and the resistance to white rule. In time, he would spend eleven years in prison, but, at every turn in Zimbabwe, white missionaries and sympathizers helped him out, even smuggling him from the country at one point. In exile, after his release from prison, he swiftly developed a reputation as a cold, efficient and ruthless leader, a high-energy contrast to the slower, less-decisive and physically ponderous Joshua Nkomo, the other great leader of Zimbabwe's independence

struggle. Mugabe sought recognition from various African heads of state as the only Zimbabwean freedom fighter with whom they should deal, but, to his chagrin, Nkomo was always given a place at the table.

The military insurrection against the white regime in Salisbury was never effective on the battlefield. Its greatest successes tended to be ambushes or farmers on isolated roads or raids on remote farmhouses. The Rhodesian military consistently won any engagements that developed. But, as in many popular insurrections, the cost off the battlefield eventually proved too great for Rhodesia to pay. By the late nineteen-seventies, Rhodesia was so heavily militarized (given its small white population) and so isolated internationally, that Ian Smith, the leader of Rhodesia's whites, realized he had to enter into negotiations.

The talks that led to majority rule, with the key sessions held in London, proved a surprise to nearly everyone involved. The British representatives, charged with refereeing the talks and helping shape the transition, dreaded Mugabe's appearance, given the reputation he had developed as intransigent, uncompromising and brutal.

Mugabe charmed his interlocutors, putting on his best, Brit-educated manners, complete with literary references, a broad smile, and an unexpected willingness to compromise—at least on some issues. On core matters, he fought doggedly to score his points, but managed to convince even Ian Smith, a ferociously racist hardliner, that the transition to majority rule was not only inevitable, but might not pose a totally hopeless situation for the white citizens of the reborn country (Smith himself stayed on in newly-free Zimbabwe).

In the early stages of independence, before he moved into the presidency, Mugabe was already recognized as the “big man” in the new Zimbabwe. He was the one to whom the officials of the old regime had to go, and he charmed them, too—initially. He kept on a surprising number of white officials and officers, and, for some months at least, had Ian Smith convinced that he truly intended to build a democratic, rule-of-law state in which all of Zimbabwe's citizens, no matter their race or tribal affiliation, would have a home. Smith, who lived to regret it, made favorable public pronouncements as to Mugabe's intentions and merits. As the British officials who had overseen the transition from white-rule to popular-rule packed up and left, the world's impression was one of relief at the bloodbath that did not happen and delight in the prospect of a newly-independent African state finally “getting it right.” Africa badly needed a success story, and the world had decided that Zimbabwe would provide it.

Soon enough, Mugabe and his party began breaking promises, marginalizing opponents, and engaging in flagrant corruption and violations of the law. But the world's attention had moved on. Another wave of white emigration began. The killings started in Mataberland. But Mugabe had achieved the status of liberation hero and no one in the West or East was anxious to take it away from him.

In the late nineteen-eighties and into the early nineteen-nineties, Mugabe engaged in a vigorous foreign policy, mediating conflicts abroad and burnishing his image as a statesman and peacemaker. In Zimbabwe, events were in a lull politically, and foreign investors were elbowing one another for a chance to enter a small, but apparently model market. The dusty colonial city of Harare began to sprout new, hi-rise bank buildings and corporate offices. World-class hotels went up and the northern suburbs experienced a building boom as wealth filtered into a new, black middle class. To the casual observer

not attuned to the regime's internal business, it appeared that everything was going right with the country. And with the Apartheid system crumbling next door in South Africa, the future seemed bright, free and prosperous.

Had Robert Mugabe retired from politics in the early nineteen-nineties, all of his excesses would have been forgiven and he would have been remembered as a great hero of the African liberation struggle and as the father of modern Zimbabwe.

But he could not bring himself to give up power.

Another respect in which Mugabe resembled his Communist mentors was his ardor for constructing a personality cult around himself. While the world saw an earnest statesman, Mugabe had already surrounded himself with corrupt court favorites and yes-men. At home, he increasingly behaved more like his imagined version of a mighty tribal chief than as a state's elected executive. And there was no one who could speak with him honestly any longer, no one to whom he would have listened for even a moment had they suggested he relinquish power and hold fair elections.

The trigger event that seems to have driven Mugabe irrevocably to the dark side was, paradoxically, the long-sought release from prison of Nelson Mandela, followed by Mandela's acclaimed leadership of a free, multi-racial South Africa. As the writer Doris Lessing points out, Mugabe had become addicted to being the world's African darling. Suddenly, he was a distant number two and Mandela was everyone's hero. It appears to have shocked him emotionally, to have enraged him. Lessing, a lifelong observer of events in southern Africa, tells a story of a conference at which both Mandela and Mugabe were present. Lunch was served from a buffet line. Mandela simply got into line with everyone else, but Mugabe, to demonstrate his superior status, took a seat and had aides run back and forth, offering one dish after another for him to accept or refuse. None of his yes-men dared explain to him that he was being mocked—publicly laughed at—for the absurdity and arrogance of his behavior. All Mugabe knew was that the spotlight had turned away from him. Almost overnight, Mugabe became the spurned lover, scorned in favor of the new guy in town.

At the same time, he lost his first wife, and, shortly thereafter, revealed a long-term relationship (and children) with a much-younger woman who became his second wife. The late Sally Mugabe, despite a taste for luxury, had been popularly regarded as a mother figure for the nation. Grace Marufu, the new wife--and already the mother of Mugabe's children during his late wife's lifetime--loved luxury as much or more, but did not bother trying to balance her image with public works or charities. She quickly became hated by the citizenry. One wonders what the change in his home life did to Mugabe, whether keeping the peace with an unhappy young wife affected his judgement about an entire country. In any case, rumors ran wild about his lack of potency (or syphilis) and reliance on quack medicines to "rejuvenate" him. He began to look more and more like an aging fool.

The electorate rejected his party in one local contest after another, and ZANU-PF's national position was threatened. Elections, never flawless, became ever more corrupt, with a much greater degree of aggressive intimidation. Again, the world looked away. In quick succession, Zimbabwe intervened in Zaire, was given a pass on that, too ("Africans solving African problems, jolly good, wot?"), then the farm seizures began. Suppression of the opposition became more flagrant and violent. Government resources were looted ever more publicly. Rogue states expanded their embassies and influence.

At last, Britain and other Western states began to take note, then to take action. Some sanctions were imposed by the British Commonwealth, the European Union and the United States (to the West's discredit, though, it was the treatment of white farmers, not Zimbabwe's black majority, that moved them to action). Travel bans were imposed on Mugabe and the ruling elite—which was especially painful for those accustomed to lavish shopping trips to Europe.

Mugabe was not impressed by the sanctions. He may be a cruel man, and sometimes even a foolish one, but he is not weak. And the refusal of his fellow African heads of state to condemn his behavior and this regime's excesses allowed him to couch the confrontations and the imposition of sanctions as neo-colonialism, the attempt of the West to impose its will and its values, once again, on black Africa.

There is a very important, if unattractive, lesson here when we consider the Western left-wing and liberal reactions—or lack thereof—to Mugabe's destruction of his country's economy and society, the regime-condoned murders, and the use of torture and hunger as political weapons. What we see at work is left-wing racism. Indeed, in Europe and America, the racism on the left is both greater and more pernicious today than that of the right--because left-wing racism is disguised as tolerance.

One of the most serious blights on African development overall has been the left's modernized version of "little brown brother" prejudices, the tacit belief that men and women with darker skins cannot and must not be held to the same standards as we hold our own societies. The left's willingness to turn a blind eye to dictatorial rule, to violent abuse, to paralyzing corruption, to torture, murder and even to genocide in Africa has granted a free hand to murderers in presidential palaces from Khartoum and Kinshasa to Harare.

We should make no mistake: The failure to hold strongmen and abusive regimes in Africa (and elsewhere) to high standards of human rights observance, ethical government and commercial honesty is racism, pure and simple. The left's unspoken assumption is that "They're really not capable, they're really not as good as us."

Western tolerance for shameful abuses, the alacrity with which we look away, and the condescension we display toward troubled states is simply a modernized form of bigotry. Of course, the dictators and their cronies would complain if held to Western standards of behavior. They would mobilize mobs in capital cities. And, doubtless, the French would try to profit from the situation. But if we hope to see a brighter future for sub-Saharan Africa, we must raise the bar for the behavior of African governments, rather than letting the men who have seized power in Zimbabwe or elsewhere continue to lower it.

Heroes

One of the great frustrations of visiting Zimbabwe is listening to the endless complaints about Robert Mugabe and his government. It doesn't take long to reach a point at which you want to ask, "Well, why don't you *do* something about it?" Despite the regime-driven violence, Zimbabwe's society is, indeed, passive by African standards. It makes the people immensely likable, but it makes it harder to change a government.

That said, there is, in fact, a powerful and growing opposition to Mugabe and his regime. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has evolved into an umbrella movement for the disaffected—which means for a great majority of Zimbabwe’s citizens. If free and fair elections were held today, the MDC would sweep the country. Instead, its leaders are on trial for treason.

The leaders and the rank and file of the MDC have demonstrated surprising tenacity in the face of regime oppression. MDC head Morgan Tsvangirai, who emerged from the trade union movement, has proven courageous and resilient. Time and again, MDC candidates have faced death threats when they ran for office, but many ran—and won—anyway. Mugabe’s current “youth group,” the Green Bombers, a paramilitary organization that recruits young men and boys from the slums and turns them into thugs loyal only to Mugabe, is notorious for persecuting MDC candidates and voters (as well as white farmers, black farmers, farm tenants, etc.). Violence against the opposition has become endemic. What should surprise us isn’t the absence of violent revolution, but the persistent, unkillable faith of the people that change will come if only they do not give up.

The MDC has allies. First, an independent press (see below) that Mugabe has not been able to extinguish. Second, the clergy. And third, the business community. The bravest group is the press, the most self-interested is the business community—and the most dangerous to the regime is the church.

Praying For Change

The church that educated the young Mugabe now stands firmly against the excesses of the president and his regime. Churches have become (as they were during the freedom struggle in South Africa) meeting places, places of refuge, and sources of inspiration. Mugabe, who knows his scripture, accuses the churches of ignoring the admonition to render unto Caesar, but the churchmen (and women) feel they cannot turn a blind eye to the oppression they see all around them.

In Zimbabwe, we are seeing a new twist on liberation theology, evolving from the left-wing movement that struggled against rightist regimes in Latin America (and against perceived US hegemony) into a more conservative movement standing against left-wing—dictatorial and statist—regimes. Indeed, the role of religion in Zimbabwe and throughout Africa has the potential to evolve into new, hybrid form that, at one extreme, insists on human rights and democracy and, at the other, could result, in the out-years, in the creation of Christian social orders that resemble Islam in their pervasive demands on everyday life.

Throughout Africa, evangelical, pentacostal and syncretic forms of Christianity are gaining in power. While we associate these movements with Protestantism, Catholicism, too, is evolving into forms that ultimately may create far greater doctrinal challenges to the Vatican than the practical non-conformity of North American Catholics. Indeed, the

most fundamentalist Christian groups congregate in like dress that falls just short of formal uniforms, women cover their heads, and liturgies can be much more rigid than Westerners associate with Christianity in the developing world. African churchmen often view their Western co-religionists as self-indulgent, weak, and strayed from true practice. Watching believers walk miles in the sun to attend an open-air service under a tree or in a tent, or to pack themselves into a ramshackle church, one has the literal sense that Christianity is on the march in Africa.

Another fallacy North Americans tend to have about the Christian faith is that it is immutable, a constant. In fact, Christianity has undergone many mutations, and the Christianity of Europe in the Middle Ages bore scant resemblance to the Christianity of the early martyrs; likewise, a European Christian of the Renaissance would hardly recognize a modern American Baptist as a fellow Christian. One of Christianity's strengths has been its adaptability (albeit in the face of great institutional resistance), and modern-day Islam's calcification, its genuine immutability, has severely crippled the ability of many Islamic societies to adopt first to the industrial and now to the post-industrial ages.

The next schism in Christianity may be between Western and African practices, but an even greater likelihood—well north of Zimbabwe—is a fierce confrontation with north African Islam. Americans tend to see the conflict between the West and Islamic extremists from the Middle East as the great, bloody interfaith, or at least inter-cultural, struggle, but the number of lives lost in the West vs. the Middle East conflicts in our time has been small compared to the level of bloodshed in the northern third of Africa, where Islam and Christianity collide. From the decades-old, ferocious struggle in Sudan, through the increasing number of interfaith riots and pogroms in Nigeria, to the recent confrontations in Ivory Coast, the great wars of faith in the twentyfirst century thus far are occurring in Africa, not in the Middle East.

Zimbabwe, given its atmosphere of crisis, is one of many states that could see an outburst of religious dynamism, the rise of a messianic, transformative cult or a form of Christianity that is essentially new in its social demands and political aspirations. This is not meant as a prediction, but only as a suggestion that Africa may be the 21st century's wild-card continent. Christianity is only one of many issues that could conceivably bring the continent and the United States closer together—or drive us farther apart.

And the continued spread of AIDS is a very dangerous variable on the religious front, as well. Lethal plagues drive men and women to extreme forms of religion. The truth is that we in the West do not have the insider knowledge to recognize if this is already happening beyond our range of vision.

At present, the formal churches of Zimbabwe promote social peace and reject violence. The grass-roots religious movements of tomorrow, in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, may reject social peace in favor of evangelical ferocity.

In any case, Libyans and other Arabs who bought large tracts of land or gained other concessions from Mugabe as the regime scrambled for oil and income may find themselves far less welcome tomorrow than even the most bigoted white farmer was yesterday.

The Press, Native and Foreign

There are several legacies from the British system that even Mugabe has not been able to overcome. One is the tradition of an independent, impartial judiciary. Although Mugabe has done his best to corrupt the system, forcing out honest judges and packing courts with sympathetic ones, he has continually been frustrated by the adherence of most courts to constitutionality (the concept of constitutionality itself being another British legacy never quite taken seriously in the former colonies of other European powers). Many judges have been brave almost to the point of foolhardiness—although, being human, others have simply resigned, fled or fallen into line. Mugabe may ignore one judicial ruling after another, but the rulings keep coming, to his fury and embarrassment.

Another legacy that will not die is the tradition of parliamentary independence, even within a party. Despite Mugabe's lavish corruption, some members of his own party have publicly resisted many of his measures. Perhaps the most important issue on which a few influential members of ZANU-PF have faced him down has been freedom of the press.

Whether members of his own party fear the power accumulating in Mugabe's hands and are trying to keep a lifeline open, or if they truly believe in the principle of a free press, the effect has been a startling anomaly: A dictatorship in all but name, with spirited, critical and courageous daily newspapers.

I cannot think of another regime so repressive in which a newspaper as outspoken and combative as Zimbabwe's Daily News has continued to publish. There are other bold newspapers, as well (along with government organs), but The Daily News has been Mugabe's nemesis. Its presses and offices have been bombed. Its reporters have been arrested and beaten up. And its editors have been charged with every crime short of cannibalism. Mugabe even tried, recently, to ram through an aggressive libel law that would have protected him from criticism—when the courts ruled it unconstitutional and key parliamentary figures signaled their own displeasure, Mugabe was forced to withdraw the amendment. Recently, senior editors at the paper have been replaced by the parent organization and it remains to be seen what, if any, effect it may have on the paper's outspokenness, but, as of May 2003, The Daily News could be purchased in most of Zimbabwe's cities and towns, while international readers could read its lead articles and editorials on-line.

Zimbabwe is one of the most complex problem states extant. While opponents of the regime live in danger of being murdered or tortured, the courts and the press are resilient. Important religious leaders are forthright in their condemnations of human rights abuses. Although the country can appear crazily inconsistent, there seems to be a tacit understanding on the parts of all except the worst regime thugs that certain lines cannot be crossed. Mugabe has been permitted to destroy the economy, but he has not yet been able to suppress a key newspaper. He has been able to go forward with the seizure of five thousand private farms, but has not been able to overcome all judicial resistance to his excesses. And although he has thoroughly corrupted the military and the police, he has not—at least not yet—been able to order them to eliminate defiant clerics.

Perhaps most notably of all, Mugabe has never felt able to declare himself “President-for-life.” He has done his best to turn elections his way through every conceivable trick, means of intimidation and blatant corruption, but he has never felt able to dispense with elections entirely—or to deny all opposition movements a place on the ballot. He has used armed force to kill political opponents en masse and his police have engaged in outrageous chicanery to prevent people from voting, but Mugabe desperately craves the legitimacy conferred by elections.

If Nelson Mandela’s emergence as the new great man of Africa bitterly disappointed Mugabe, nothing has so angered him as losses at the polls. In the last round of elections, an independent study indicates that Mugabe’s regime inflated voter rolls by 1.8 million. Yet, even with almost two million ghost voters, widespread fraud, “lost” ballot boxes and direct intimidation, he and his party only “won” by 300,000 votes.

Perhaps the impact of his missionary school education continues to battle for Mugabe’s soul against the Marxism that came afterward. And perhaps he can be seen as much in terms of Shakespeare as in any tribal tradition, less a typical African strongman and more Richard III—who, for all his purported crimes, could not place the crown upon his own head, but needed others to confer it upon him.

And if Mugabe has stolen elections, he was born in a stolen country.

The Great Theft

The normal structure for a paper such as this would offer a historical summary near the beginning of the text. A conscious decision was made to do the reverse, to describe Zimbabwe’s current plight first, then to offer a brief historical perspective to see if it alters the picture.

While its neighbor across the Limpopo, South Africa, saw its first white settlers in the middle of the seventeenth centuries, followed by three-hundred, fifty years of white expansion, competition between Dutch and English settlers, consolidation, economic development, the Apartheid system of the latter half of the twentieth century, all climaxed by a unique, promising attempt at racial reconciliation and cooperation, Zimbabwe saw its first small column of white settlers—prospectors—only in 1890. And Zimbabwe never attracted the numbers or achieved the relative density of whites that South Africa did. It always remained a frontier state, and its whites always had something of a siege mentality.

Britain did not want and had no intention of acquiring the tribal lands that became first Rhodesia, then Zimbabwe (and, for that matter, Zambia). But one man had visions of empire and he was determined to drag Britain along behind him, whether the deliberative men in London desired it or not.

Cecil Rhodes, a man Americans view benignly, thanks to his legacy of Rhodes Scholarships, was one of history’s great pirates, a brilliant scoundrel who stole and looted on such a grand scale that, instead of being judged a criminal, he was able to cast himself as a pioneer and patriot—on the old principle, “Small thieves get a prison sentence, great thieves get a peerage.” Rhodes managed to bluff and cajole London, fool and suborn the

colonial parliament in Capetown, and to bully Lobengula, the tribal king of the territories he wished to possess. Armed with one of history's most dubious (and soon dishonored) treaties, Rhodes sent two hundred men in his initial settlement column, promising investors that the new territories would hold gold and gemstone deposits that would put to shame the recent discoveries of gold and diamonds on the Witwatersrand outside of Johannesburg or the diamond pit at Kimberly.

The treaty with the king placed careful restrictions on the prospectors, all of which were soon ignored. More settlers followed, settling around Fort Salisbury (today's Harare) or near Bulawayo and the hill country with which Rhodes himself fell in love.

Lobengula had only agreed reluctantly to any deals with Rhodes's agents, restraining his tribal *impis* from waging war because he had noted and feared the fate inflicted on the Zulus hardly a decade before. He knew his warriors were no match for British armaments, organization and resources. When Rhodes's settlers continued to grab land and ignore tribal rights, Lobengula even tried petitioning Queen Victoria—without success.

Both the Ndebele and the more northerly Shona tribes were finally so pressed by the land seizures of Rhodes's corporation and the concessions it granted that a tribal rising broke out and spread across the territories. Since Rhodes had tried to economize by reducing the constabulary forces in the settled areas from about six hundred to only one hundred and fifty, the thinly spread settlers were nearly overwhelmed. Hundreds were killed, including a "relief column" of several dozen mounted men (a defeat that Rhodes cleverly turned into an instant myth of a gallant last stand, with claims that the men died singing "God Save the Queen" as they fired their last rounds).

It was a near-run thing, but enough settlers were able to consolidate to defend key points and the cavalry did arrive. Thereafter, a campaign of slaughter was launched against the rebellious tribes and 1897 is still remembered by black Zimbabweans as the year the first war for freedom, the first *Chimurenga*, ended in a merciless defeat. The native king died a miserable death, hunted by the whites over a war he did not want, and despised by his own warriors for his attempts at accommodation and ultimate failure.

If the capital of the new territories was named after Lord Salisbury, the British foreign secretary, the new territory forced upon the crown soon became Rhodesia. The best land was taken from the tribes, which were forced onto ever smaller patches of poor soil. The railroad came, and the merchants, and the clubs. Soon enough, Rhodesia had been "civilized" and its native population reduced to beggary.

Rhodes was certainly a man of his time and cannot be judged entirely by later standards. He was, undeniably, a visionary, heaping up ever greater dreams—although his fondest dream, of a Cape-to-Cairo railway, uniting all of Britain's African possessions, never became a reality. Often in poor health, Rhodes nonetheless spent hardliving years on the mining frontier of South Africa, amassing a fortune. He became a statesman and a broker of nations, and he became a hero to many—if not to black Africans.

After his early death, which was treated as a state event both in South Africa, where he had held high political office, and in Rhodesia, the country he had carved out of a continent's heart, he was buried, as specified in his will, high in the Matopo Hills near Bulawayo. Statues of Rhodes dominated Rhodesia's cities for decades. Boulevards and monuments bore his name. But with the advent of majority rule, the statues came down

and the streets were renamed to honor very different heroes. Yet, thus far, his grave at “The View of the World,” a stone massif from which the visitor has a stunning panoramic view in all directions, remains undisturbed and reasonably well-maintained. If only for his titanic audacity, he probably deserves that much.

The history of Rhodesia through most of the 20th century was one of a society increasingly out of step with the greater world. In a liberalizing era, frontier bigotry not only prevailed, but intensified as the tiny minority of whites hardened their front against a vast majority of blacks. In step only with South Africa, Rhodesia imposed ever more sanctions on black residents and, as independence came to many former colonies around the world in the wake of World War II, the whites clamped down still more fiercely. Finally, Ian Smith broke with Britain over plans to move, very slowly, toward minority rule. White Rhodesia was going to last forever, defiant and self-sufficient.

By the 1970s, Rhodesia had become one of the world’s outlaw regimes, threadbare and struggling impossibly to keep up its spirit. When it arrived at the end of the decade, freedom and majority rule seemed a grand new dawn. It turned out to be a false one, lived in the dark shadow of Robert Mugabe.

Will the 20th century be kinder to Zimbabwe? In the short-term, after Mugabe’s death or deposition, we may see either a bloody power struggle or a compromise unity government emerge. We don’t know because the people of Zimbabwe themselves do not know. Longer term, any new government will have to contend with the economic destruction of the Mugabe years, with rampant corruption, with lawlessness, with the neglected infrastructure—and with enduring tribal rivalries. A new government will face no end of legal claims, from dispossessed farmers as well as from the rogue states to which the Mugabe government has granted land and concessions. It will not be a smooth transition—and even Tsvangirai and the MDC could turn out to be a great disappointment. Yet, Zimbabwe still has so much to offer that a sound government likely could attract extensive foreign investment, despite the country’s recent history. Not all of the wreckage will be repaired, but the potential remains for the country to make a reasonable comeback over time.

Mugabe has done such severe damage, in so many ways, that the costs will be tallied for decades to come. He has poisoned the country he helped free. Zimbabwean rangers believe that the deadly black mamba has the ability to strike the first seven people in a line of walkers, but lacks the venom to claim an eighth victim. The question is whether or not Robert Mugabe has exhausted his venom or might coil for one last, terrible strike.

Songs from the graveyard

Approaching the Zambian border, I sat in a crammed, rattling bus. A collection of young Zimbabweans had packed themselves in the rear of the vehicle. With the hot air of the day blowing in through the windows and endless thickets rolling by on both sides of

the road, those teenagers and young adults began to sing. As the bus grunted along, their voices swelled and soared with ever-greater enthusiasm. Although they were just a random assortment of passengers going from one place to another, they sang with almost professional skill, in harmony and staggered musical dialogs. It was wonderfully joyous, rich with rhythm and so powerful it seemed amazing that the bus could contain it. Their singing was of a quality that would put a good church choir to shame. They sang exuberantly, smiling, laughing and beating time on their thighs or on the seats. Despite the countless problems each of them faced, you might have thought they hadn't a care in the world. They were having such a grand time that I couldn't help grinning along, wishing I knew the words to join them. I was almost jealous at the intensity of their happiness, the ease of it all. I clapped with them and looked from one bright face to another, always met by a smile, by a vivid delight in the pleasure of the moment, in music, in the golden light of the fading afternoon, in life itself.

Then I remembered that, in ten years, half of those young singers would be dead of AIDS.

Postscript to Zimbabwe:

In the first week of June, 2003, the MDC and its allies in the opposition staged a nationwide series of protests and strikes to attempt to force Robert Mugabe to step down. The government's response was a wave of arrests, a second charge of treason against MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai followed by his "preventive" detention, and police, military and gang violence against the people. As of this writing, reports continue to filter in of deaths and torture.

Once again, the governments of Zimbabwe's neighbors have chosen to quietly continue to support the Mugabe regime, rather than recognizing the popular will. The greater world's attention is focused elsewhere. Mugabe remains defiant, insisting that opponents to his regime are lawbreakers and traitors influenced by, in his own words, "the embassies of Britain and the United States. The population continues to survive on international food relief. And the people of Zimbabwe wait for Mugabe to die.

THE LION: SOUTH AFRICA

The new “imperialists”

In Capetown, a woman who worked as a negotiator for a South African company specializing in oilfield development couldn't wait to complain to me about corruption. But it wasn't South African corruption that was working on her nerves. It was the graft-and-bribe culture she encountered in other African states.

“Luanda's a *constant* frustration,” she told me. “But at least one can work with the Angolans. If I had my choice, though, I should never go back to Nigeria again. The Nigerians are simply impossible. And Lagos is dreadful, filthy. Whenever I'm sent there, I can't *wait* to get back to Capetown.”

Her tone of voice made it clear that she could have substituted the word “civilization” for “Capetown.” By the way, she was *not* a white South African.

There is plenty of corruption in South Africa, but corruption is a matter of scale. In South Africa, corruption is prosecuted, even when it occurs among the great or almost-great. Government officials have found themselves standing before the judge's bench, and Winnie Madikezela-Mandela, the infamous former wife of Nelson Mandela, recently heard the gavel come down, with a prison term looming. Ranking government officials have lost their positions because of sweetheart deals on vehicles and favors done. It would be all too easy to shake one's head over these cases as examples of “inevitable” African corruption, when they are, on the contrary, evidence of South Africa's determination to continue to develop as a rule-of-law state. Nor is this corruption a new phenomenon related to multiracial government—the fallen Apartheid regime was corrupt at the highest levels. South Africa is moving toward a more honest and open state than any it has seen over the past half century.

Elsewhere in Africa, from Zimbabwe to Ivory Coast, corruption is celebrated.

This is a critical distinction. For all its tribulations, South Africa is a Western-model constitutional state. It is violent, unfair, tormented, polarized and certainly imperfect. But it is a state in the process of constant self-improvement (though not without occasional setbacks), of healthy self-criticism, and of increasingly sound business practices.

Other Africans don't like it.

We Americans, with our long neglect of Africa, tend to see the continent as uniform—and uniformly disastrous. Yet, when other Africans look at the South Africans, the descriptions they employ almost sound like those Europeans and plenty of others direct toward Americans: brash, aggressive, self-righteous, greedy and inconsiderate of the local culture. And they are not talking only about white South Africans, by any means. This is how other Africans see black South African businesspeople.

The South Africans are even accused, commonly, of being imperialists.

Certainly, an American without a sense of context might pass through South Africa and see only a country on the brink of disaster—and South Africa unquestionably has

enormous problems and offers painful contradictions. Yet, the more I saw, the more uncanny my sense became that the South Africans really are the “Americans” of sub-Saharan Africa, a raucous, noisy, rule-of-law democracy that works, almost despite itself, and in which market forces are ever more powerful.

Perhaps the most striking resemblance, though, is that South African businessmen have a surprisingly mature global perspective that leads them to invest internationally; the countries that profit from the investment complain, yet their own best and brightest can't wait to decamp for South Africa. Indeed, South Africa is a magnet for economic refugees—of all classes—from the rest of black Africa to at least as great an extent as the United States is a draw for Latin Americans and Asians.

Some might argue that South Africa's industrialists and investors should be investing at home, since the country badly needs further development and job creation. Further, critics might argue that these international investments are simply the rich hedging their bets in case the South African experiment in nationhood fails as abjectly as has every other such experiment on the continent.

There is some truth to each criticism. Yet, profitable investments return money to South Africa. And no one invests in Nigeria, Angola, Mozambique, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Zimbabwe or other African countries because they want to play it safe—yet, South African corporations are present across the continent. South Africans see markets and new possibilities where non-African investors register only unacceptable risk and potential disaster. They recognize opportunities we cannot even see. Across the coming decades, South African business efforts may have a more profound and much more positive affect on the continent than a half century of far less incisive aid programs have achieved.

With comparatively high-level management skills, solvent corporations, and its unique position as a (mostly) black state that can pay its own bills and still invest abroad, South Africa is already the region's powerhouse, and there is no reason to suspect its grip will slacken in the future. South Africa isn't just a major player in sub-Saharan Africa—it's *the* major player, economically, but also politically. Its military role has been kept largely in abeyance, but there are signs that this sensitive variety of influence will also play an increasingly significant role with President Mbeki's central role in sponsoring the African Standby Force (ASF) and South Africa's related leadership in the African Mission in Burundi (AMIB).

South African businessmen reach beyond the continent, as well. Of course, de Beers, Anglo-American (neither Anglo nor American) and other consortia whose wealth originally came from a variety of mining concerns are well known internationally. And their importance isn't going to fade in the near future. What is striking, however, is how other, lesser-known firms are branching out abroad. South African Breweries (SAB), for example, became SAB-Miller earlier this year when it purchased Miller Breweries in the United States (perhaps not the wisest buy, but SAB-Miller wanted an entry into the huge U.S. market). SAB-Miller also has extensive brewery investments in China. Profit margins are low and the problems many in the People's Republic, but the South Africans are determined to stay in the game in that vast market, as well. They are thinking strategically.

The South Africans are just the opposite of the Russians: While the post-Soviet Russians wanted profits now, tomorrow be damned, and gleefully alienated a long list of potential partners, the South Africans take a long view.

Nor are these South African businesses any longer white preserves. Though boards may be disproportionately white even now, they are not exclusively so. The businessmen of South Africa realized very quickly that the government was not going to look favorably on a lily-white business community, so they swiftly brought in black citizens (preferably with connections, of course). And South Africa's nascent black middle class got beyond any lingering left-wing rhetoric virtually overnight and plunged happily into the joys of capitalism. That black middle class has swelled, in less than a decade, from 3% of the total to almost twenty per cent—still not equitable, still not sufficient, but representative of a stunning increase in black wealth (especially considering that it was largely the result of doing business, not of expropriations, as would have been the case in other African states).

South Africa is on the right track—or tracks—developmentally. Its greatest enemy is time: with the enormous levels of unemployment and poverty, can progress prevent an eventual explosion of popular discontent? At present, even poor black South Africans see other blacks getting ahead and, despite many disappointed (and initially unrealistic) expectations, there is no sense of near-term danger. But it remains too early in the game to declare South Africa safe from future unrest, should the economy stall or decline for an extended period.

Certainly, an American investor seeking to do business in South Africa, depending on his luck, might encounter levels of corruption that discouraged him, as well as high levels of nepotism and legal chicanery—especially if he is unfamiliar with the far less attractive conditions elsewhere in the developing world. Yet, the best comparison is not to other major African states, but to American frontier capitalism of the past—a comparison used inaccurately to discuss the thievery that passed for capitalism in post-Soviet Russia, but which applies quite well to post-Apartheid South Africa.

One fine South African writer, Tom Lodge, reports the comment of a local vendor of t-shirts in another African capital city as the South African football team arrived at a hotel.

“They are not really Africans,” the vendor said, “they have their own plane, they bring their own food and water, and they think they are above the rest of us.”

As American as apple pie.

Trainspotting

If you take a train between any of South Africa's major cities—rolling steadily through a landscape as varied as that of the United States—you get to see the dejected, rusted-out side of things, if only through a glass window. Everywhere in the world, industrial plants are located along the rail lines, and South Africa's largely antiquated manufacturing base can look like a blackened relic of a bygone age. On the long

outskirts of the cities and industrial towns, you see the half-idle, or fully idle, plants. Others are still puffing away, although they look like museum pieces. And everywhere that you see the factories and smelters, you also find mile after mile of slums along the tracks, a visual demonstration of the great poverty and inequity that will continue to affect this often-ravishing land, even if things continue to go right for the country as a whole.

When you drive into Jo'Burg from the international airport, it looks as if you're approaching a first-world city. Up close, it resembles a Third World city at the top of its game. Capetown, on the other hand, seems like a First World city with problems on the edges (and a nihilistic party scene that echoes Manhattan in the 1970s). But, from the railroad, you see South Africa's Third World, the slums where so much of mankind is quartered, from continent to continent.

Certainly, South Africa has an increasing number of new and modern factories. And the government's efforts to provide adequate housing have been monumental, if still short of the population's needs. South Africans, even if the odds are often dramatically against them, have opportunities the rest of the continent only craves. But the decades of relative isolation, during which South African manufacturing technology fell behind (except in the military-industrial sphere, where no effort was spared), cost the country dearly. In South Africa, industry works. But it does not always work well. Development is uneven, whether speaking of human or industrial development. There are stretches in Natal where you might believe yourself in England, if you don't look too closely at the type of trees composing the greenery, with pleasant small towns and schools where the children wear blazers and ties. And there are other stretches where you might think you are in the industrial England of the 1930s or, at best, the 1950s.

Modernization is needed badly, and, by African standards, it is happening amazingly swiftly. The basic infrastructure ranges from fair to excellent, as far as transportation goes. But it is going to be a long haul before the millions in those endless, meandering slums find adequate jobs.

Given the brutality of the Apartheid government—especially in its final decades, when legal forms gave way to beatings, torture and murder—and the continued poverty of so many blacks, what is truly astonishing is the lack of active hatred, of political or racial violence directed against whites (pure criminality is another matter—it's pervasive and targets all races). Again, so much credit is owed to Nelson Mandela that it literally cannot be measured. After the Apartheid government's cruelty and the brutality of its security services as they attempted to hold back the historical clock, many a leader might have called for, or at least tacitly approved of, revenge. South Africa could have become the bloodbath so many whites feared on the eve of majority rule. That the country did not cover itself in the blood of its former oppressors is one of the political and moral triumphs of our time.

But those endless slums need real hope, not endless promises. There is a great deal of disappointment in their lanes and shebeens, after the heady days and great expectations of the transition to minority rule. Reality has set in, and a degree of cynicism. It has not yet turned to anger, and blacks *do* see other blacks getting ahead in sufficient numbers to placate them for now. But South Africa must continue to expand its economy and won't be able to tolerate a deep slump for decades. Economic growth is the key to social peace.

While progress has been made, the social inequities that remain are as dangerous as they are indecent.

South Africa has benefited greatly from a cluster of leaders of commanding moral authority. Whether it can continue to produce such leaders in the future may be crucial to the nation's ultimate success. With the best will in the world, many of South Africa's citizens will be very fortunate if the country can offer decent lives to their grandchildren. Meanwhile, we are dealing with lost generations of human talent.

Looked at through one window of the train, South Africa is a First World country with Third World problems. Looked at through the other window, it is a Third World country with First World expectations.

Slumming

Soweto. For most Americans, the name conjures images of rioting and poverty. And there is still plenty of poverty, although the rioting has ceased. But Soweto—an abbreviation of the “South-West Townships” of Johannesburg—is far more complex than its common image abroad.

The ever-growing assortment of townships that compose Soweto is striking in its variety. Some of these areas have been settled for more than half a century, while others have sprung up since the end of Apartheid. If you drive out to Soweto from Johannesburg (a grim, embattled city, Jo'burg plays Detroit to Capetown's San Francisco), leaving the upscale suburbs across town, with their hotels, indoor malls, and residential compounds with wire-topped walls, their fierce watchdogs and lush foliage, you first cross the old commercial downtown, uglier and more forlorn than the worst American inner-city, then, once you get on the beltway, you pass the gimcrack new developments for those who have gotten one leg up but not two, housing compounds built where the mining industry has gone idle. The highway is excellent, the traffic is brisk, and your first glimpse of Soweto will be a middle-class neighborhood off to the right, where the neatly-kept houses range from prim cottages to near-mansions. It doesn't fit the image.

On your left, you pass the mammoth buildings of the Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital which serves all of Soweto. On the outside, there's a crush of market vendors, relatives ranked at bus stops, cars with battered fenders jockeying to break from the main highway, and aimless young men with nothing better to do than wait for fortune to fall on them. The hospital reportedly can accommodate between eight and ten thousand patients, and its expansion is a measure of the government's commitment to improving public health.

Nonetheless, the public health system the hospital represents is overwhelmed. Despite doctors and nurses immigrating from Zimbabwe and other troubled African states, there is a chronic shortage of skilled staff—bad in Soweto, far worse in the rural districts and tribal areas.

If you look at that vast hospital through one lens, you see dedicated medical personnel warring against terrible odds and a government determined to do all it can for its long-suffering poor. But if you examine it through another lens, you see a facility in

which up to fifty per cent of the patients in overcrowded, under-tended wards are dying of AIDS, drug dispensaries that are often robbed by local gangs, murders in the hallways and wards, and systemic deterioration.

South Africa is, above all, a land of contrasts.

Farther along, the townships shift constantly, from the long-settled neighborhoods with their neat gardens and pride of ownership—the standard building plan is often a two-main-room company house (now privatized) with eccentric additions—to pockets of upscale houses near the famed street that was home to two Nobel Prize winners, Mandela and Desmond Tutu (Mandela's own home was humble). There are supermarkets, strip malls, traditional stores of the sort seen from Africa to the South China Sea, market stalls, vendors carrying their wares, all not so much mingled as jostling against one another, trying to elbow each other out of the way the future slowly winning against the past, the upwardly-mobile surging past the unskilled and unconnected.

Winnie Madikezela-Mandela lives in a dirt-colored mansion that looks like a fortress (or perhaps it's a fortress pretending to be a mansion), a blocky, heavy, menacing building in a high-walled compound. Across the road from her decorative flowerbeds, garbage is strewn about. Behind the mansion, ancient trash lies heaped. All this is the classic Third-World pattern, where nothing is of concern beyond one's own property. Yet, a couple of hundred meters away, a middle-class neighborhood is as neat as anything in the Washington suburbs. Winnie and her values belong to yesterday. South Africa is moving on.

Then there are the true slums, but even these have a hierarchy. Just off the highway, not far from the hospital, a few boys mill in a parking lot, hoping that one of the occasional, heart-on-the-sleeve European or American tourists will show up to see how they live. The boys offer tours with self-effacing politeness, and even if you don't need a guide, it's almost cruel not to walk along with one of them to let him earn a few coins. Stretching into the distance, over the next hill, you see shacks of corrugated iron sheeting, others of cinderblock, their packed-dirt compounds swept and patrolled by chickens—it's the determined, imitative neatness of the poor who have not yet given up hope, who believe, against the odds, that the future *will* be better.

The government does what it can for these "settled" poor, providing port-a-potties at unencouraging intervals. Some settlements have electricity (often pirated), others don't. But in all those poor lanes you see women carrying clean water from taps the government maintains.

Then there are the slums beneath the slums, the haphazard mazes of shacks cobbled together down in the flood plain, in the drainage swamps, where those South Africans live who have fled the countryside but lack family connections in Soweto. They sleep side by side with the unwanted, fretful refugees who have fled across the border from Mozambique or Zimbabwe, who have come all the way down from Zambia or worked their way around from Angola, yearning for work, any work, where there are not enough jobs for the native-born. They have made journeys that were, in many instances, far more dangerous than those Latino immigrants make in the American Southwest, because, like those other ambitious travelers, they have heard that there *might* be a job and might be a future, even if that future is only for their children.

The flood of immigrants pouring into South Africa, despite the lack of job prospects or any support mechanisms for them, may be the surest barometer of how badly the rest of sub-Saharan Africa has broken down.

Like Americans, South Africans are hated for their success (however relative that success may seem to us). Yet, those who criticize still come. Hoping.

Soweto has produced men and women of courage and genius. It produces artists and the best music in Anglophone Africa (the very best African music comes from the territories once colonized by the Portuguese). But Soweto also produces more than its share of criminals and killers. Saturday nights produce a wartime level of casualties.

Of course, there *was* a war. A war for freedom. Hardly a decade ago. It was a long war. And long war's leave their effects.

Tribes

On the edge of Johannesburg, near a dreary amusement park, there is a brandnew museum dedicated to the Apartheid era and the black struggle for freedom. It is not only a brilliant effort, but a surprisingly fairminded one. Certainly, the most rabid Afrikaner (Boer) extremists, with their pseudo-Nazi uniforms and paraphernalia don't receive generous treatment. Overall, though, there is no effort to vilify whites because they were white. In the long, heartwrenching series of exhibits, what you see is a human struggle, depicted with great honesty. Only a single factor is played down:

Tribal violence.

The photographs of necklacing—pulling a fuel-drenched tire over the shoulders of a victim then setting it alight—are there. And there is additional evidence of the fierce violence between Zulus and Xhosas in the waning years of Apartheid, when the government played one tribe against another, then in the power struggles of the first, confused days of freedom. Still, you never quite get the scope of the black-on-black killings, or the depths of the hatred, or the unhealed divisions.

If we ever see another outbreak of widespread violence in South Africa, it will not pit blacks against whites. It will involve, once again, blacks killing blacks.

This is not meant to predict such violence—one hopes it may be avoided, not least through economic growth and expanded opportunities. But the resentments, jealousies, bigotries and hatreds remain.

In Soweto, the poorer the neighborhood, the likelier it is to be organized by tribe (or by immigrant group). One of the greatest efforts of the African National Congress (ANC) in the anti-Apartheid struggle was to reconcile blacks with each other (as well as with Indians, whites and those of mixed race). The Apartheid-era government, for its part, worked to keep blacks divided, dispensing special favors on Chief Buthelezi of the Zulus, granting him more generous powers of self-government in the Zulu homelands and, in the government's death throes, providing arms and money to the most violent elements of Buthelezi's Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

In the climax of the long freedom struggle, blacks killed more blacks through direct violence—riots, lynchings, dormitory raids, neighborhood pogroms and assassination—

than the white government did during all the Apartheid years. This is not meant to excuse the old government; on the contrary, that government encouraged and even sponsored much of the violence. Rather, it is a story of tragedy.

You do not get the sense, in that fine new museum of the anti-Apartheid struggle, of the divide that remains between South Africa's main tribes. In its last years, the anti-Apartheid struggle turned into a civil war between blacks, fought primarily on urban battlefields, in the slums and near-slums, and in the industrial yards and dormitory complexes. To put the results into an American context, the hatreds go much deeper than did those which resulted from the American Civil War. Whether or not they shall last as long remains to be seen.

Zulu

When American military officers hear the tribal name "Zulu," they are apt to think first of the film of the defense of Rorke's Drift, starring Stanley Baker and a very young Michael Caine.

The film is a fairly accurate description of the engagement, its gravest error the intentional alteration of the character of one Private Hook. In the film, Hook is a drunken ne'er-do-well who reforms under fire and wins the Victoria Cross. The real Hook was a gentle giant, a teetotaler, and known as a reliable soldier. Only the heroism was accurate. By film standards, of course, that's a minor sin.

But for all its authenticity as to the combat, the film is deceptive in a much greater, sadder sense. The heroism of Lieutenants Chard and Bromhead, and the stalwartness of B Company, 2nd Battalion of the 24th Regiment of Foot, remain beyond dispute. But what the film does not supply is context, beyond the opening reference to the British battlefield catastrophe at Isandhlwana. The viewer gets the impression that the British column had been sent to quell a treacherous native uprising and expand the civilizing benevolence of the Great White Queen.

Yet, in the overall campaign, the treachery was on the British side. The film, inspiring though it may be, does not mention that the Zulu King, Cetshwayo, had done everything he could to avert a war he did not want and knew he could not win. He was betrayed by a British agent whom he had come to regard almost as a brother. And why? Because the Zulus, once considered a potential counterweight to the Boers, suddenly became a liability when the British decided they could win over the Boers for the British empire. Boer farmers wanted more of the rich lands belonging to the Zulus and the British decided to give it to them, as a bribe for political cooperation. So the British made unacceptable demands upon Cetshwayo, demands they knew he could not accept. Nonetheless, the Zulu king accepted all the demands he could. To no avail.

The British wanted war. And they got it.

When news of the massacre of the British column at Isandhlwana reached Cetshwayo, he supposedly remarked that the victory would be his undoing. And he was right. The British regrouped. Lord Chelmsford, the military blunderer, was able to redeem his

disaster with a decisive victory just before a replacement from England could relieve him. The power of the Zulu nation was broken at the king's kraal at Ulundi. Cetshwayo went to prison (although he later was released, on terms. The Zulus were reduced to enduring poverty and subjugation. And, two decades later, the British had to fight the Boers, anyway, in one of the most notorious wars Queen Victoria's empire ever faced (the British invented the concentration camp in the course of their campaigning, interning Boer civilians to deprive the all-too-successful guerrillas of sustenance—the British forces scorched the High Veldt with a thoroughness that would have done credit to Stalin).

But the Zulus kept alive the warrior tradition through which they had gained such fame. Theirs remained a violent culture, kept under control by outright oppression. When the dying Apartheid government decided to permit, then further instigate, massive anti-ANC violence by Chief Buthulezi's IFP, the traditions were there, waiting to be perverted.

Many of the Zulus who attacked ANC members—and Xhosas in general, wherever they might be found in Johannesburg, or Durban, or the lesser industrial cities of Natal—used assegais, the short stabbing-spear you see piercing red tunics in the movie.

Today, the violence is subdued, the stuff of arguments over women in shebeens on a weekend night, rather than that of massed political movements. But the distrust remains, quiescent, but still very much alive. It is to the credit of each of South Africa's successive post-Apartheid governments that they have been able to achieve at least a surface peace. But it will require continued economic development to sustain social order. The Zulus remain poor, unintegrated, and discontented.

The nun on the battlefield

There is a handsome lodge built into the side of a cliff at the edge of the Isandhlwana battlefield. Frequented mostly by aging Brits with an interest in military history, it overlooks the roofs of a village that still lacks electricity or running water. Just beyond the settlement, a low, lion-shaped mountain rises from the plain, the feature from which the battle took its name. The battlefield has a few monuments, not in good repair. You can climb the rock face, if you want. Guided battlefield tours are available, conducted at a level a cut above war college staff rides. But the guided tours do not include the life of the village. The tourists are interested in the dead, not the living.

I walked back to the lodge in the evening light after scrambling up the mountain. An Anglican nun had just gotten down from a bus held together by its own fumes—or perhaps by the people packed into it. She had two heavy plastic bags and was sweating, struggling to carry a load of provisions bought in the nearest market town. My white South African companion didn't even seem to see her. I stopped and asked if I might carry her bags.

Partly, it was an unselfish act, a genuine desire to help. But I also have traveled enough to know that, if you can help someone in need, they will start talking and not stop. Assistance opens mouths—and doors.

The nun was startled. It remained an unusual, utterly unexpected gesture for a white man to offer to help a black woman, even one wearing a religious habit. When I picked up her bags and she understood—on time delay—that I really meant to ease her burden a bit, she smiled so enormously it seemed to defy the laws of physics.

To his credit, my South African companion sheepishly, but good-naturedly, took one of the bags. And they truly were heavy, packed with supplies for her mission.

I had wondered why none of the locals—Zulus—offered to help her. When I asked her where she was from, the reason came out: her native village was far away, near Port Elizabeth, in Xhosa country. The church was trying to break down prejudices, to pretend they didn't matter. And so she had been sent to practice her faith in the middle of the Zulu homeland.

Perhaps such efforts will work, eventually. We walked up past the water pipe the government recently had introduced to the village and the nun led the way into the open compound of the mission, telling me about the four girls, "Very sick, I'm afraid they are dying, you know...they have come in from the country."

To my eyes, we already *were* in the country, in the land of gravel roads, wells and the occasional generator. But the nun spoke of little settlements tucked back into the hills. The girls were dying of AIDS, of course, although it was impolite to discuss it. They lay in a shabby, impoverished clinic where the medical care barely reached above the level of first-aid. There wasn't a real clinic in the village—just a building called a clinic, with good intentions and an empty medicine cabinet.

A few other sisters hurried out of the compound's buildings, along with a helper or two, all astonished, as if they had witnessed a miracle. They simply had never seen a white man carrying bags like that—it was an event from outer space (or perhaps the heavens). When I gave a donation equivalent to about twelve dollars—out of pure shame--the amazement grew greater still.

There is a peculiar kind of greed that has no selfishness in it. It is a gentle, yet desperate form of greed, born of privation, of long struggles to make do with little or, sometimes, with nothing. In the case of those nuns left in the middle of nowhere, doling out love to dying girls for lack of medicine, it was the greed of saints. We call it gratitude to make a better thing of it. But I do not think St. Peter or St. Paul could have pried that banknote from the sister's hand.

For me, it was a minor act of charity, the price of a couple of beers. A hearty dinner and a bottle of wine waited up in the lodge, and we would have lights run by a generator as the village faded into darkness. For the nuns, the banknote was a small miracle.

I left the compound. Likely, the girls on the worn cots are dead by now. And the Zulu men, all pride and dreams and unskilled strength, doubtless did not carry the nun's bags when next she took the bus to fetch supplies.

But what the Zulu males *did* carry, from the mines and factories, with their workers' barracks and regiments of prostitutes, was AIDS. The point I took from the encounter with the nun had nothing to do with goodness, really. The point was how thoroughly AIDS had penetrated the most remote villages in the country.

What was also noteworthy about the clinic—what made it different from other clinics that tend injuries and a range of sicknesses—was the absence of relatives of the sick. Usually, there are little tribes of them. When they are not present, you know that AIDS is. Those four dying girls had been abandoned at the clinic.

We had a lovely supper, grilled outdoors, half a mile from the dying.

The homeland

Both presidents of South Africa since the end of Apartheid, Mandela and Mbeki, are Xhosas. They have pleaded for national reconciliation, not only between the races, but between tribes. They are, without question, sincere. But they are also the men in power.

Chief Buthulezi is not the king of the Zulu nation, but the senior political leader—the true power, although he is publicly deferential to the king. Buthelezi continues to suffer from his miscalculations in the last years of Apartheid. While the ANC, with its elder leaders imprisoned, continued to resist the regime, Buthulezi accepted the Apartheid government's offer of extended powers and some autonomy in the Zulu homeland (now incorporated into the state of Kwazulu-Natal). Buthulezi viewed—and views—himself as a champion of his people. Non-Zulus saw him as a collaborator.

In the early 1990s, when it appeared—to Buthulezi's dismay—that the ANC would not only come to power, but do so overwhelmingly and swiftly, he and his supporters fought in the streets and alleys, on the roads and in the industrial complexes.

Seen from the idealist's viewpoint, it was an inexcusable horror, with atrocities on both sides compounding one another. But from the realist's, if not the cynic's, perspective, Buthulezi accomplished a great deal through the bloodshed. He bought a large measure of continued autonomy, of special treatment, from the new regime, much of which he and his party continue to enjoy.

A man more vindictive and less wise—less great—than Nelson Mandela would have moved quickly to wrest as much power as possible from Buthulezi and the Zulus. Instead, Mandela (and his successor) and the ANC have engaged in a slow, methodical campaign to win converts from Inkatha. There is something of a contest between the state government of Kwazulu-Natal, controlled by the IFP, and the national government, with the ANC in power, to distribute largesse in the Zulu homelands (a relative largesse, of course—the area remains impoverished). The ANC also has tried to spread out from its urban bases, such as Durban, in the province, tempting IFP party officials with patronage jobs and promises of entrée to the national level. With the ANC strong in the Indian and colored communities, and with a good bit of ANC (or New Nationalist Party) strength among white voters in Kwazulu-Natal, Buthulezi must feel increasingly under siege.

And not without reason. Although the government truly does live up to its pledge to foster a South Africa for all its citizens, the Xhosa predominance is unlikely to change. And as a resident of Gugulethu, a high-density suburb—a slum—outside of Capetown,

put it to me, “I like President Mbeki very much. Of course, I like him. I am a Xhosa and he is a Xhosa. I know he will take care of me.”

On the other hand, the thirty-something man who said that to me had little reason to be thankful to Mbeki. Not because Mbeki had turned his back on the Xhosa, but because Mbeki had turned his back on the problem of AIDS—a disease whose telltale wastage had begun to whittle away at my conversation partner.

The plague of the young and fruitful

One of the many tragedies of AIDS is that it disproportionately strikes those in their most productive, most energetic years. It strikes those who have achieved some success, or who at least have jobs, at a greater rate than it does the idle, or the elderly. AIDS strikes those with the means to gain access to multiple sexual partners, those with money or power. And, of course, it strikes their sexual partners, whatever their station in life.

By 2000, official government estimates judged that almost five million South Africans were HIV-positive. Since then, the numbers have only increased. And the government estimate appears conservative, an attempt to pretend that, at some mad level, the AIDS crisis is manageable. International estimates put the percentage of infected South Africans at a minimum of 20% of the population. Some estimates range above 40% (probably too high a figure, at least for now). In particularly hard-hit communities, though, over half of the people may be HIV-positive. The investigative assessments and statistical methodology are insufficiently detailed and thorough to offer fully reliable numbers.

What we do know is that, as a minimum, over a quarter of a million South Africans die of AIDS each year. The real death toll may be markedly higher. Rural people, especially, view the disease as shameful, thus many deaths may be reported as resulting from other causes, although they are actually AIDS-related.

Despite high birth rates, the population of South Africa will begin to decline in about a decade. Meanwhile, for those who struggle to build decent lives in the streets of Soweto, or in Capetown’s black slums, such as Langa or Gugulethu, the greatest expense in their lives is the cost of ostentatious funerals.

If you visit any of the slums, to experience their complexity and variety for yourself, you will soon be steered toward a “traditional healer,” a tribal medicine man who, threatened by the encroachments of modern medicine, is glad to put on a show of his herbal and animal-gland remedies for the stray tourist of misery.

The “healer” may offer you something for headaches, or a grease that, rubbed on yourself just before sexual contact, will keep your spouse faithful forever (he swears it works, without exception). But what the “doctor” will not offer a white face is advice about how to cure AIDS.

It is a different story when only blacks are present. Then there are various compounds and infusions that might be tried. But, above all, there is the horribly tragic advice, current from the Cape through Zimbabwe and northward, that sex with a female

virgin will cure AIDS. Given the early age at which sexual activity begins among many South Africans, this often means raping a child.

You will not see many female children straying about on their own in those slums.

How on earth has the situation broken down so badly? Part of the answer is, of course, the inadequacies of the medical system, the price of drug cocktails, and the impossibility of a cure. But another, infuriating part of the answer lies in the absence of bold leadership at the highest levels—or the lack even of honesty.

President Mandela failed to address the AIDS issue powerfully and forthrightly, thus wasting his tremendous moral authority. Many excuses may be made for Mandela on this count—not least his imprisonment and lack of contact with social developments. After his release from detention in 1990, Mandela had to relearn the world around him, and, overall, he did a remarkable job. Yet, his failure to take on AIDS, to warn, cajole and encourage the population, to speak frankly, and to devote the government's attention to a plague far more deadly than Apartheid, may be South Africa's greatest missed opportunity since the old National Party began to construct the Apartheid system in the late 1940s.

There is, however, no excuse for President Thabo Mbeki's outrageous handling of the AIDS issue.

Although he has softened his stance over the past several months, Mbeki spent years insisting that there was no credible scientific evidence that HIV infections are the cause of AIDS. His adamant denials baffle even his own fellow members of the upper echelons of the ANC and government—although he has found a few supporters. Clinging to pseudo-science from dubious sources, Mbeki refused to attack the AIDS plague by confronting HIV infections at the source.

Mbeki is a well-educated man who affects an English manner and wears English-cut suits. He is not a populist man of the people, but the (relatively) privileged son of Govan Mbeki, one of the early leaders of the anti-Apartheid struggle. He does not fit any of the stereotypes favored by unreformed colonialists or bigots. While not an inspiring speaker, he is otherwise a capable man—the sort of low key executive suited to following a giant like Mandela, a transitional figure of solid, if undramatic qualities.

No one has convincingly explained Mbeki's denials of the link between HIV and AIDS, or his weakness for scientific charlatans. But in an undereducated population such as South Africa's, rumors become "facts" in the absence of direct and credible explanations from the issue's source. Mbeki has wrapped himself in mumbo-jumbo on the issue—even backtracking now and then from his grudging compromises on the necessity of treatment and prevention—and left himself the target of the gossips and storytellers.

One rumor claims that Mbeki is HIV-positive himself and does not want to face the implications. There is no evidence to confirm this. An even harsher rumor insists that Mbeki, Mandela and the rest of South Africa's leadership welcome AIDS as a way to reduce the ranks of the unemployed, taking pressure off the government to provide promised jobs. This theory quickly falls apart on the grounds of sheer logic. Perhaps the most believable interpretation is simply that Mbeki could not bring himself to face the magnitude of the problem and the expense serious anti-AIDS efforts would demand of a government whose resources already are spread thin.

In any case, a decade has been lost between Mandela's neglect and Mbeki's denials of the issue. More and more, campaigns are gearing up to educate the population about AIDS and to attempt to offer at least rudimentary treatment—drugs, when available. But the issue remains politicized and controversial.

Worse, the cultural attitudes within the majority population make it especially difficult to control the disease. The tradition of village men going off to work in the mines and factories without their families aggravated the practice of having multiple sexual partners, serially or simultaneously. And, as in much of Africa and Latin America, condoms are viewed as unmanly and detrimental to sexual pleasure. Along with the frequency with which other sexually-transmitted diseases are encountered, these social traits have allowed the HIV-positive population to explode in number. Both the high level of rape and less-than-optimal conditions in hospitals and clinics further worsen the problem.

The children of the dead

South Africa currently has at least two million and possibly over three million AIDS orphans. Many are cared for, to some degree, by relatives. Tens of thousands are in overcrowded, understaffed orphanages—often relatively makeshift affairs. Still others, in great, uncounted numbers, live on the streets or in the worst corners of slums. Some are already dying of AIDS and related ailments. Others will become infected with HIV through abuse or casual promiscuity. But a plurality, if not a majority, will survive into adulthood. The problem is of a scope that has made it increasingly unmanageable.

But the problems the situation poses today, from petty crime to deep human suffering, may be only a shadow of that which is to come as hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of orphaned children become lawless, illiterate, uncontrolled adolescents, then adults. If not subject to comprehensive intervention early on (which South Africa simply cannot afford), many of these orphans may become irredeemable, permanent members of a violent, destructive underclass that profoundly challenges the society to which they belong. Such masses of the unskilled and hopeless are the natural recruits of charismatic leaders, from gang bosses to would-be dictators to religious fanatics. They tend to be both street-smart and naïve in the face of the greater world. Some will behave anarchically until they are imprisoned or killed. A minority will, indeed, manage to improve themselves, against all odds, with that inexplicable ingenuity and determination which appears to be inborn to fortunate members of the human race. But still others may respond with ferocious, unquestioning loyalty to the first father-figure who offers them a semblance of pride and the illusion of dignity (whether derived from fanatical faith or a gun held in the hands). And the leader who offers them both a purpose that elevates them above the more-successful members of society and the power to inflict their will on the more-privileged will have at his disposal the tool to destroy a fragile society.

Many questions will only be answered by time, such as the extent to which AIDS orphans will become a destabilizing force in South Africa's future, or the degree to which

children of the street will retain tribal allegiances or develop along totally different patterns of loyalties. In the end, badly run orphanages, which instill hatred and resentment in artificially bonded groups, may prove even more dangerous than the street as an environment for nurturing the most destructive tendencies in these children. At present, as much as six per cent of South Africa's population may consist of AIDS orphans. And both the raw number and percentage will only increase—even if, over the years, half of those orphans die of infection themselves.

While this paper focuses largely on South Africa's future potential, common sense always demands that we ask what the quality of any society might be if, one day in the future, one in ten, or an even greater number, of its members have grown to adulthood without parental care or supervision, on the streets or in parentless aggregates in the countryside—or in inadequate, or brutal, orphanages. Is the result “Lord of the Flies,” a police state, “Mad Max,” or something entirely new?

The government of South Africa is not ignoring the problem. It is overwhelmed by the problem. A reckoning, perhaps of an unexpected sort, must one day come due. Africa may, indeed, pioneer new forms of human societies. If some or those forms look forward, others may look backward to a savage state of humankind. If you wanted to predict where a grotesque, successful, ferociously destructive leader might emerge, bet on the child of genius who survives to adulthood on an African street or in an African orphanage, then acquires rudimentary military training.

The human wastage among these children is tragic. The danger at least some of them may pose in the future could be appalling.

Alternative outcomes

The reaction of the population to the AIDS epidemic, thus far, follows historical patterns of human behavior in the face of other lethal plagues, although a bit less dramatically for the present (just as the slow advance of the disease is less dramatic than the great plagues of bubonic plague, cholera, smallpox or others). Many remain in denial: “It can't, or won't, happen to me.” Others take a fatalistic, nihilistic attitude, behaving even more luridly and unrestrainedly in the face of death: “We're all going down, so the rules don't apply and I might as well enjoy life.” The corollary of this is an ugly truth about the society: There is little compunction about spreading the disease to others, startlingly little sense of guilt.

But perhaps the most interesting part of the historical pattern that has begun to manifest itself is the embrace of fundamentalist religion or other rigorous enthusiasms of faith. Repeated waves of the Black Death in late-medieval and Renaissance Europe broke the hold of the established church and led, on one hand, to reform movements and, ultimately, to today's mainstream Protestant denominations. On the other hand, the psychological dislocations of plagues led to violent radical sects that veered into social madness (some of them resembling larger-scale versions of al Qaeda). In times of plague, charismatic leaders who claim to understand God's anger with humanity, or who

claim to speak for God directly, can have catastrophic effects on society. South Africa—and other African countries—may simply be waiting for their galvanizing leader.

As a minimum, plagues cheapen the perceived value of the lives of others, a problem already sufficiently challenging in much of Africa.

Although history tends to mumble when it repeats itself, keeping one eye on the development of cults and millenarian Christian movements—mutant sects that catch on big in Africa—could prove a worthwhile strategic endeavor (don't watch the dwindling militaries, watch the growing congregations). Given the continent's often-overwhelming problems, the confrontation with Islam to the north, and the search for a psychologically comforting African identity that has been underway since the collapse of colonial regimes, history's next sweeping religious movement may emerge from AIDS-ravaged Africa—if it does not arise first in China or, just maybe, Latin America. It would, most likely, be a mutated form of Christianity. But it could be something entirely new.

This is not intended as a prediction. Any linear extrapolations based on historical examples are likely to be wrong. But we do need to think beyond the easy conclusion that AIDS will simply kill tens of millions, hold Africa back, and keep the continent a strategic backwater. That may, indeed, be the scenario that comes to pass. But it is also possible that, as in plague-swept Europe, the AIDS catastrophe will unleash new energies and new visions. It might as easily lead to a fanatic militancy as to dissipation and despair. Instead of holding Africa back, what if AIDS drives it to develop and progress in totally unexpected ways?

Is an Africa in which tens of millions die of a horrible disease inevitably fated to remain a strategic backwater? A century after the Black Death, Portuguese explorers were searching for a southerly route for India; fifty years later, Spain had grasped its first bits of the Americas, Islam was on the retreat from the Iberian Peninsula and soon would be driven from Russia, then from Eastern Europe. The dislocations of disease arguably led to the flowering of the Renaissance, to the Reformation, to democratic forms, to collective bargaining, to contract law—and to the shattering of the feudal system that had kept Europe's human capital from developing itself. Plague shattered the old and opened the door for the new. The sense of the fragility of human life and having seen the most horrible fates suffered before one's eyes seems to have emboldened Europe on every front—including militarily. The Black Death didn't sap energies, but unleashed them. It isn't a question of straightforward math, but of unexpected responses to a changed world.

One of humanity's great unexplored dynamics may be the relationship between a devaluation of life and risk-taking. Before the Black Death, there was a timidity and embrace of social order in Europe that changed with remarkable speed in the wake of mass die-offs that swept away between one-third and two-thirds of the population. Although slower to kill, AIDS is, for now, of even greater lethality than bubonic or even pneumonic plague (only the septicaemic variety is a totally uncompromising killer). What if Africa does, indeed, lose between one-third and two-thirds of its population? Will it become a ghost continent? Or will AIDS break down the structures, both tribal and post-colonial, that have inhibited Africa's development? What if AIDS turns Africa, or at least some crucial parts of Africa, into the new pioneer of human organization?

Much of this is, of course, extremely speculative. And it unquestionably sounds cold-blooded to wonder if positive developments might not emerge from so extensive a tragedy. But we can be at least as certain that the current conformist thinking about

Africa—a mere dismissal that doesn't really involve thinking at all—is going to get it wildly wrong. We cannot say how we will get it wrong—but we are not even paying attention to the problem, just waving it away, relegating it to the “Too hard to do” block. Africa's disasters may, in the long term, lead to opportunities. India's problem, by comparison, is that the lack of pervasive disaster has led to social stagnation.

The most important strategic element in President Bush's January, 2003, state of the union message to Congress may not have been his remarks about terrorism or weapons of mass destruction, but his announcement of an initiative to increase America's AIDS-related assistance to Africa to \$15-billion. And the president seems determined to cajole and embarrass Europe into matching America's contribution.

This matters. At a time when we are focused almost entirely on the high-cost neighborhood of the Middle East—where many of the problems may prove insoluble, no matter who becomes involved or how deeply—we may be passing on the world's strategic bargains.

Africa, with its untapped human resources, mineral wealth, and development needs may be the 21st century's strategic investment bargain. Those development needs may represent opportunity, rather than impediments, for those willing to take a long-term view. And the most dramatic human developments outside of North America may come in sub-Saharan Africa. Recent remarks by General Peter Pace of the USMC to the effect that the United States must pay more attention to Africa went largely unnoticed by the media, but may have signaled the first stirrings of what could, over decades, become a crucial strategic initiative.

What if, instead of the 21st century becoming the much-heralded Pacific Century, it proves to be another Atlantic Century, with a new, postmodern “scramble for Africa”?

The Strategic “Dogs of the Dow”

Strategic thinking—around the world, in every major government--parallels the behavior of amateur stock-market investors remarkably closely: Everyone flecks to the hot stocks of the day, with little serious analysis and the assumption that everyone else can't be wrong. We have allowed ourselves to become fixated on the hot stocks—and the junk bonds—of the day: The Middle East. Certainly there are sound reasons for our engagement there, from oil needs to fighting terrorism. But we're putting all of our money down on today's problems, instead of hedging at least a share of our strategic investments in tomorrow's potential.

The Middle East has oil, but little else. It is unlikely that the Arab world, especially, will become anything resembling a “success story” in our lifetimes. Africa, by comparison, has enormous undervalued potential. And Africa, too, has oil, as well as other key resources. Future historians may be amazed at how readily we abandoned an entire continent—a potentially very rich continent—to warlords, dictators and thugs.

South Africa, with its democratically elected government and sound laws, is the closest thing there is to a strategic key to the continent. Even the more-populous

Nigerians are hated, despised and self-defeating. South Africa is, at present, the only real African power, and it may become much more influential in the future. It is also a natural ally for the United States, once the revolutionary generation, infected with left-wing prejudices, exits the stage. We may need to take an indirect approach to building the relationship of the future with South Africa, at least until we see a generational shift to younger technocrats. That approach might involve more vigorous engagement elsewhere in Africa—working cooperatively with South Africa—while letting business and selective aid programs drive the relationship with Pretoria for the present. But we need to study seriously the possibilities—and challenges—of building a sound, long-term, mutually beneficial alliance with South Africa. The stakes may be an entire continent.

A previous paper done for CETO (“Hidden Unities,” June, 2002) argued that there is little room for the expansion of American hegemony or even decisive influence in Asia. We may draw closer to India, but probably not to China, while our relations with states such as Japan and South Korea will either remain at approximately the current level, or diminish somewhat. Europe is bent on excluding American influence at its continental core (and, in the out-years, Europe may be headed for greater instability in countries such as France, Italy and Germany, with relatively greater stability in Poland and other eastern European states: one possible variant for Europe is less, not more, unity, as local crises emerge from aging populations, immigration problems and state bankruptcy as a result of entitlement programs). The Middle East will, at best, become more benign, but the Arab world is unlikely to extend a broader welcome to America—even if our efforts lead to dramatic improvements in personal freedom and individual welfare. While gratitude is nowhere the strongest human emotion, in the Arab world gratitude is nonexistent.

The only regions in which the United States and its key allies can build new, fruitful alliances for the future are to the south, on the other continents bordering the Atlantic, South America and Africa.

Without doubt, there are many obstacles to building reliable alliances with the key powers on these continents. But we may overstate the challenges, while underestimating the advantages, of investing more of our strategic capital to the south, instead of to the west or east. Latin America, Washington’s neglect of which is one of the most inexplicable follies of our time, is not immediately pertinent to this paper (except as discussed in “Hidden Unities”), but, in the case of Africa, there are natural affinities between the continent and the United States which we overlook.

Africa cannot turn to the Muslim world for examples. With its enduring bigotry and slaving legacy, the Islamic sphere is an enemy, not a potential ally, and the levels of violence where Islam meets Christianity in Africa are destined to increase. Nor will Africa look to Europe much longer (with the single exception of Britain), where its former colonial overlords have yet to overcome their colonial mentalities. Increasingly, Africans view France as an enemy, the dictator’s protector and an apologist for Islam—as evidenced by the signs held up in Ivory Coast, written in English and asking the United States to “save us from Old Europe.” Indeed, one of the reasons France has behaved so erratically and foolishly of late has been the government’s growing panic as it loses its last influence in one African country after another, and the current French commitment to “peacekeeping” in the upper reaches of the Congo is a desperate attempt to reassert France’s importance to Africans. Asia, for its part, is far away and purely exploitative

(the exception being ties to India through expatriate Indians in Africa, but these are generally troubled).

The United States, by comparison, offers an increasingly integrated society where blacks succeed at the highest levels. America *is* the world's great success story. The US has the wealth to invest and assist. Our military prowess and power is without parallel. And our culture is much more "African" in its artistic reforms and even language than North Americans recognize. America's fusion culture is Africa's natural strategic soulmate. Our only rival is Brazil, but Brazil lacks the resources and interest to do much in Africa, while suffering from greater de facto racial segregation today than does the United States (Brazil could, though, become a useful ally in dealing with Africa, if Brasilia could only overcome its xenophobia).

Yes, there is anti-Americanism throughout Africa. But it is often overstated. And a fascination with America is almost always just below the surface. In fact, we might make a maxim of the observation that, except in the Arab world, with its unique pathologies, anti-Americanism is generally a skin infection that can be cleared up quickly with the right treatment—hatred of one's neighbors is the cancer that goes all the way to the bone.

We often mishear what is really being said to us. When we hear unfounded and unfair accusations, we often should be hearing pleas for attention beyond the ludicrous accusations.

America has surprisingly few implacable enemies, although our true enemies are deadly ones.

In the recent war with Iraq, a fascinating strategic constellation emerged across the Atlantic: At one event in the Azores, we saw the President of the United States standing beside the prime ministers of Britain and Spain. The purpose was a show of unity on the eve of decisive action in Iraq. But you could not design a better constellation of North Atlantic powers to develop a new strategic alliance spanning the South Atlantic.

Lay out a map. Draw in just a few dozen of the many lines of cultural affinities that connect the United States, Britain, Spain, Latin America and Africa. Include Portugal, and you have a web that includes the most important and most hopeful states in the Atlantic portion of the southern hemisphere, reaching west to the Pacific and east to the Indian Ocean.

The powers that were absent in the Azores were also of significance, especially France. Despite its desperate attempts to re-engage, Paris is essentially finished in Africa. Its models have not worked, its aid money was badly spent, and its example was corrupting. The hopeful states of Africa—and the most powerful—speak English or Portuguese. With trivial exceptions, the states of Latin America speak Spanish or Portuguese—and, increasingly, English is spoken among the empowered and mobile classes. There is a rich, complex cultural, historical and linguistic network here that is simply waiting to be exploited—using the word "exploited" in a positive sense for all parties.

Strategically, we're overbidding that which is already overpriced, while ignoring the great bargains of the 21st century. Of course, such a web of alliances could not be constructed swiftly. But we appear foolish not to begin investing now. Just as small investments in early adulthood grow geometrically into wealth over the decades, so, too, might a "dogs of the Dow" strategy in Africa and Latin America pay enormous dividends for our children and our children's children.

We are an empire, whether we wish to be one or not. Certainly, we are a different, far more humane and constructive form of empire than those of the past—interested in forms of cooperation, not of occupation. But we have not yet accepted the basic requirement for successful empire: the willingness to think beyond a single life-span.

Human capital

Another paradox regarding South Africa is that, vicious and repellent though the Apartheid system was, it lasted exactly long enough to save the new, free South Africa from the socialist and Marxist infatuations that crippled so many former colonies as European empires retreated in the decades immediately following the Second World War. India, for example, gained independence just at the high tide of Soviet-style Communism, with Mao's victory already a given in China and even war-ravaged Europe flirting with socialist models. Marxist, Leninist, Maoist and socialist theory arguably did more harm to the Third World than all but the worst imperial regimes managed to do.

Nelson Mandela was released from confinement in 1990, the year after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Negotiations for the transition to popular democracy paralleled the final collapse of the Soviet Union. By the time Mandela was elected president of his country in 1994, it was evident that China had embraced ruthless capitalism behind its empty rhetoric of adherence to Marx and Mao.

The real losers in the newly-free South Africa were not the worried whites—although many left the country in the 1990s, a trend that has now reversed itself—but the members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) who had been the ANC's most steadfast allies throughout the freedom struggle. While we reject their failed doctrines, any honest observer would have to admire the courage and commitment of party members such as Joe Slovo and hundreds of others who suffered tangibly, undergoing imprisonment, torture and, sometimes, death. Their vision may have been the wrong one, but they believed in it; nor was it simply a matter of being Moscow's tools. While many whites, especially among English speakers, displayed sympathy with the freedom struggles of the country's blacks, the whites of the SACP often put everything they had—including their lives--on the line. They were in the vanguard of the struggle in the most literal sense.

When freedom came, the SACP's philosophy was a ruin and only the worst die-hards imagined it might apply to the new South Africa. Capitalism was the order of the day, and even leftwing ANC members were delighted to follow that order and enrich themselves.

The Communists got cabinet posts, but ever-dwindling influence. Each year in South Africa, the developmental role of commerce looms larger, while leftwing theory fades. Certainly, some of the rhetoric still rings out from time to time. But the SACP is no longer a serious contender at elections. It retains its token places in government at the sufferance of the ANC, as a display of gratitude, but not a path to power.

New South Africa had the opportunity to avoid the mistakes of those African states whose freedom came early and more easily. Thus far, it has done a creditable job, balancing statist programs for the poor with market opportunities for business.

Since the transfer of power, South Africa's new governments have built millions of subsidized homes for the poor, but have contracted much of the building to the private sector (not always with admirable results, it must be said). Impressive strides have been made in providing safe water taps and basic sanitation—although there is a very long way to go to provide such services to all. But business generally has been encouraged and entrepreneurs have made the most of South Africa's broad needs for industrial expansion and modernization, from starting industries from scratch to working with the government to improve outdated port facilities. While much remains to be done and plenty of room for great mistakes remains, thus far South Africa has done a far better job of self-development than has any other state on the continent. It had many advantages, in terms of infrastructure—but its greatest advantage in the end was the timing of its transition to majority rule.

Human capital was essential to that transition, and Mandela was the indispensable man in making certain it was not squandered. His assurances that there would be room for all races in the new South Africa, while failing to persuade many, did convince an essential core of whites (and Indians) to remain after the transfer of power. This was in dramatic contrast to the mass exodus that followed independence in almost every other African state.

Of course, whites had been in South Africa much longer and formed a higher percentage of the population than elsewhere on the continent. Nonetheless, the brutalities and hatreds of the Apartheid era easily could have torn the nation apart with an irremedial ferocity. It didn't happen. Largely because of Mandela.

Thus, South Africa retained the essential core of managers, technicians, specialists and businessmen not only to keep the country operating, but to accelerate growth as trade sanctions were lifted and both continental and intercontinental trade resumed. That core of expertise bought time for development. But a real question remains as to whether it has bought sufficient time.

South Africa has a wealth of raw human capital. But that capital is raw, indeed. Among black South Africans—below the professional level—there are two enormous challenges to tapping their potential, both of which will take time and resources to overcome.

Up to sixty per cent of South African blacks may be unemployed or severely underemployed. And those who are employed have a low productivity rate by world standards. That low productivity is a direct result of the Apartheid era and the freedom struggle.

During the Apartheid years, the use of black labor was bluntly exploitative. Predictably, blacks developed avoidance mechanisms—they had no incentive to overachieve at the workplace and plenty of peer pressure to do only the necessary minimum. The situation resembled that in the former Soviet Union, where one joke among factory workers went, "The state pretends to pay us, so we pretend to work."

Apartheid is gone. But a work ethic did not spring up with the first free elections. Especially among rural people displaced to the city, the regimented workstyles of the modern world (to say nothing of the postmodern) are alien to their cyclical-work experience.

Incentives should, eventually, overcome this problem. All populations harbor ambitious members, and growing wealth in a society is stimulative to those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder (motivational trickle-down). But there is an even greater problem:

Education.

One of the reverberating tragedies of the Apartheid years was the withdrawal of black children from the education system and that system's neglect. While there is a great hunger for education in the country—and there long has been, as evidenced by the determination of new South Africa's founding fathers to educate themselves—one desperate move a generation ago by the white, Afrikaner-dominated government was to insist on instruction being conducted in the Afrikaans (Dutch-derivative) language, rather than in English, in proportion to the spoken language preferred by the white population (Afrikaners outnumbered, and still outnumber, South Africans of British ancestry, and more white South Africans still speak Afrikaans at home than English).

The blacks, no matter their tribal affiliation, wanted no part of Afrikaans. First, it was the language of the oppressor, given the fierce determination of the Afrikaners to maintain a strictly segregated society, while English was the language of liberal thought and broader education. Second, black leaders saw Afrikaans as restricting the people's potential, while English enhanced it.

The initial protests were peaceful demonstrations broken up by force by the government. Blacks died—children, especially, were held up as martyrs. Some of the first globally-televised Soweto riots in the 1970s happened as a result of the Afrikaans-in-the-schools issue. But the government was not going to give way, partly because the Afrikaners were struggling to maintain cultural hegemony in the face of the early stages of globalization (and there is a deep messianic streak running through Boer history—see below), and partly because the government felt that any compromise with the black majority in response to protests would only encourage further protests.

The tragic result was a withdrawal of black children from the schools. At times, the withdrawal was physical. At others, it was manifest in indifference to studies. But, in a tragic echo of America's own inner cities, education came to be seen by many as “white,” as a tool of oppression (much more justifiably so in the case of South Africa).

The consequence has been decades of under-educated or simply uneducated black children—many of whom are now unskilled and even illiterate adults. Many are dead-enders who will never be gainfully employed. They will be overshoot by younger blacks now gaining at least some degree of education in the post-Apartheid era.

The government has placed great stress upon education. But resources are tight. Many new classrooms have been constructed, especially in rural areas. Just having a roof matters—one large village school I saw had neither electricity nor running water, but its classrooms were packed. Textbooks are scarce and outdated, and other resources are often primitive. Still, the teacher shortage is a far worse problem than even the lack of facilities.

When you fail to educate a generation, you lose a generation of teachers. Now, teachers are in painfully short supply, while pay remains pitifully low. Often, those teaching young children seem barely literate themselves. On a relative scale, any reading and writing ability is better than none—but many, if not most, of the nation's elementary

and secondary schools simply are not yet preparing students to be productive members of the workforce.

Student motivation appears to be improving—the hunger for knowledge is always there, in every culture, waiting to re-emerge. But the shortages of teachers—not just of qualified teachers, but of any teachers at all—along with the shortage of textbooks, supplies and facilities is daunting.

One eight-year-old boy I met in rural Kwazulu-Natal was the pride of his family. His father had a low-level managerial job and dedicated every penny the family could spare (and some they could not spare) to educating the boy. He was going to private school in a nearby town, an institution previously reserved for whites and now with a mixed student body. To get there, the boy rode a pony several miles, then walked, then took a bus. Every day.

His playmates who went to the local government school were in awe of him. The boy could speak fair conversational English, while twelve-year-olds from the government school could barely manage a few pleasantries. The private school had computers. The government school's technology consisted of overhead fans.

This is not intended as a criticism of a government that is struggling with limited resources (although corruption remains a problem, with ghost teachers still on rural payrolls in the most corrupt localities), but to describe both a problem and an opportunity.

South Africa is not yet prepared for a direct alliance with the United States—at least the majority of government members are not. Military cooperation will remain largely ad hoc, when it occurs at all, for the coming decade or longer. But the United States has a great opportunity to do tremendous good at a relatively low cost, while building the goodwill that could lead to a much more fruitful cooperative relationship in the future.

President Bush's anti-AIDS initiative for Africa has exceptional practical and political value—it flummoxed leftwing critics. If sincere, enduring, moderately-funded efforts against AIDS and in related public-health spheres could be matched by an initiative—a serious effort on a scale beyond that of current Peace Corps activities—to improve education at the elementary and secondary levels in South Africa, we might do good while doing ourselves a great deal of good.

Public health and education are the glaring problems. The economy will likely take care of itself—if these problem areas are tackled successfully. This paper certainly cannot attempt to design an educational-aid program, but one important factor would be the relatively low level of skills required. The standards insisted upon (fraudulently and selfishly, in many cases) by America's teachers' unions are irrelevant. South Africa's children need to learn the most basic of basics. One problem would be convincing the most fervently leftwing South African politicians that it was not a subversive plot to brainwash children. We could get past that. This is a nation desperately in need, and a portion of the help will have to come as charity from the outside. Essentially, skilled South Africans—those who truly can operate in today's economic conditions—are near full employment, and you cannot draw them into teaching the poor. But a U.S.-sponsored effort, especially one that demonstrated visually how our diverse society works and succeeds, could be one of the best investments made in our foreign policy endeavors.

We certainly cannot educate the entire continent—or even all of South Africa. But we could make a difference, of mutual benefit to all parties. Its untapped human potential could be a far greater strategic resource than all of South Africa's ore, gems and minerals.

If we did not have such a small, overtasked Marine Corps, I would suggest seeking volunteers for one-year tours of duty as teachers in South Africa (or elsewhere). The participating Marines, NCO or officer, likely would emerge from the experience as extremely capable Foreign Area Officers.

Whether or not the U.S. should take an interest in helping South Africa in the field of education, either directly or through funding, this may be even more critical a need in the long run than AIDS-related assistance. Whenever we get to the other end of the AIDS crisis, the survivors will not be able to take advantage of any meaningful opportunities if they lack educations. And those who do not learn to achieve learn readily to hate.

The current wastage of human capital in South Africa, unavoidable in the short-term and even mid-term, is one of the world's neglected opportunities. This is an African country that really could work—that already is working. The continent's future may be decided within its borders.

White tribes

Americans can identify easily with many aspects of South Africa's history of settlement—and with the mythologizing of the white conquest of the land. The first Dutch settlers landed near the Cape of Good Hope and established the settlement that would become Capetown. The Dutch government viewed the small colony as no more than a provisioning point for ships bound to and from the Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia) and population growth was slow—nor were the original settlers particularly attractive sorts. But, by the eighteenth century, more reputable agricultural settlers arrived (“Boer” is dialect Dutch for farmer, similar to the German word “Bauer”; the Boers are now referred to as “Afrikaners”) and began to move into the interior, encroaching ever more avidly on aboriginal and tribal lands. These settlers also brought with them a fierce, uncompromising Calvinism, a fundamentalist Protestant belief in predestination and a holy mission on earth closely related to the theology of America's Pilgrim fathers (who initially had taken refuge in Holland, before moving on to settle New England).

The frontier skirmishing, the raided settlements and the inevitable defeat of the natives did not inspire as many outright wars with aboriginal peoples as were fought in North America, for several reasons, the most important of which were the lower population density overall and the lack of imperial competition during the first century of settlement. The geopolitical “Great Game” was played in North America long before its heyday in mid-Asia, but there was little international interest in southern Africa beyond the collection of reprovisioning ports, such as Portugal's enclave at Lourenco Marques, today's Maputo, in Mozambique.

For the Boers, South Africa was their promised land, a new Canaan, and the Bible and the musket were kept at the ready in every oxcart pushing deeper into the interior, in every farmhouse, and around each campfire. Devout, rigorous in their morality, fiercely communal in their loyalties, yet independent in their opinions, hard-working and

intolerant, they bore a remarkable resemblance to the men and women who settled much of the early American frontier.

The first significant wave of English settlers did not appear until 1820, when a small group landed to the east of Capetown and founded the settlement that would become Port Elizabeth. The English already had formal control of the territory of the cape, but the Boers continued to live apart and go their own way to the extent they could. Nonetheless, plentiful conflicts arose over Boer efforts to expand their cultivated lands at the expense of the local tribes, while the British sought to honor treaties and keep the general peace. The contrast between the Boer emphasis on God's law and British constitutionality often resulted in mutual incomprehension—aggravated, of course, by the language barrier—and in active dislike.

By 1838, the strictest and most discontented factions within the Boer community broke with the British authorities and set out on a long migration northward into territories yet unclaimed by any power—oddly enough, they were seen off with the formal presentation of a Bible from the senior British official on the scene (one pictures a very British, very frustrated colonial magistrate thinking, “And good riddance.”). The territories these Boer pioneers would open up were to become the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, the last great Boer homelands.

These *voortrekkers* and their Great Trek mark the real opening of the Afrikaner myth of South Africa. They were tough, fervently-religious people with a messianic vision, somewhat akin to the Mormon settlers of the American West. They took their ox carts over the forbidding Drakensberg Mountains (tough hiking, even today, in the age of GPS and air rescue) and into their promised land, intent on living exclusively and self-sufficiently.

But the British always followed after, driven sometimes by the adventurous will of individuals, at other times by British immigration, by a perceived need for imperial security (only reluctantly recognized by London, where successive governments of the great age of empire struggled to avoid additional foreign commitments) and, fatally, by the discovery of the diamond deposits at Kimberley and the gold and diamonds of the Witwatersrand, in the very heart of the states the Boers had carved out for themselves.

Meanwhile, the British settled the coast, reaching northeastward to close the gap with Portuguese claims, founding Durban and spreading inland into Natal.

The attitudes toward the local tribes were similar to those toward blacks in mid-19th-century America: The Boer attitude was akin to that among American Southerners, while the British reflected the different values of our Northerneastern states. Although the British often fought skirmishes and outright wars with the local tribes, the problems more often than not arose in relation to the Boers—who were always ready to fight. Indeed, the key Boer frontier myths, after the Great Trek itself, focus on settler massacres then on the “miraculous” Boer victory at the Battle of Blood River, at which the Boers literally circled the wagons and slaughtered their attackers.

Even the Boers' commemorative statuary could be transplanted to an American city in the Midwest or the Rocky Mountain states: A stern, determined man in simple clothes and a broad-brimmed hat, with musket in hand and a bonneted, Bible-clutching wife shepherding their children beside him. With few exceptions, the Boers were not well educated—except in Biblical scripture—and were overwhelmingly hardscrabble farmers. They never became rich or even comfortably well-off as a group, despite the discovery of

some of the world's most spectacular ore and gem deposits in their midst. The revelation that their farmland was studded with gold and diamonds simply led to destabilizing influxes of prospectors from the British Isles and elsewhere—wild, hard-drinking men whose values were repellent to the Boers. The Boers wanted to grow crops, but they had the bad luck to repeatedly pick farmland atop seams of ore and gemstones so rich they are still being mined today.

The Boers brought Bibles and plows. The British brought railways and steam-power.

The British also introduced coolie labor from India—the foundation of today's vibrant Indian and Asian communities in South Africa—after the tribals proved unsatisfactory workers. Conditions for the laborers were harsh, but in hardly more than a generation the Indians had flourishing communities of their own (where a young Mr. Gandhi would develop his political theology).

The British also brought mission schools. While some German-speaking Moravian missionaries did move along with the Dutch settlements (Moravians were also crucial in the settlement of eastern Pennsylvania), the educations they offered were, at best, rudimentary. The Moravians concentrated on spiritual and physical welfare, on applied morality, not deep learning. The British and Irish missionaries, in contrast, were not only much more numerous, but taught formal classes, founding schools and then colleges. Consistently, the Boers tried to exclude blacks from knowledge, while the British hoped to educate a clerical class to fill the lowest levels of an empire's bureaucracy.

In the end, the British system won out—almost all of the key black players in the South African freedom struggle were the products of British-run schools and missionary colleges (Methodist institutions were, and remain, especially strong). The graduates of the University College of Fort Hare are a who's who of the independence movement.

As the 19th century drew to a close, Boers were under siege by miners, farmers, Capetown legislators, British capitalists and self-appointed imperialists such as Cecil Rhodes. The British had already leapt ahead across the Limpopo and, although a few Boers pushed much deeper into Africa, those in South Africa had run out of new lands to which to move. And their attachment to their soil, after the hardships of the Great Trek, went very deep.

Despite British attempts to woo the Boers, even fighting a war of aggression against the Zulus largely to bribe the Boers with more territory, the differences felt as irreconcilable to the Afrikaans speakers and members of the Dutch Reformed Church as other differences felt to American Southerners on the eve of our own Civil War. And the Boer War was at least partly a civil war, if also a war of conquest. The Boers felt they had no choice but to fight—and the British utterly underestimated the Boer will to fight and their capabilities to conduct successful and sustained operations.

In another sense, too, the parties to the conflict resembled those in the American Civil War. The Boers, like the Confederates, represented an agrarian way of life that was increasingly at odds with modern times, while the English represented the progress of industry, rational organization, trade and science.

After a string of initial Boer victories, such as Spion Kop, and sieges, such as Ladysmith and Kimberley, British numbers began to tell. The Boers lacked the mass and the resources to fight a conventional war against the British empire—so they turned to guerrilla operations, deploying into mounted “commandos” that struck the British

unexpectedly in their camps or in their rear areas. It was a strategy that could not win militarily, but which was extremely difficult to defeat.

The British response, after Lord Kitchener's arrival, was to deny the Boers essentials, from food to gunpowder. Farms were burned and the families of the men off at war were brought into camps for which a new term had been developed: "Concentration camps," literally where non-combatants were concentrated. The British did not mean to be cruel to civilians, but the camps proved unsanitary and were often ill-supplied. With the outbreak of disease, thousands of women, children and the elderly died.

Meanwhile, the British deployed ever more troops, building lines of complex field fortifications along the rail lines and river lines to deny the Boer commandos operational mobility. Then the British mobile columns slowly, but relentlessly, converged on the remaining Boer units. By the time the Boers surrendered, at the dawn of the 20th century, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal had been ravaged.

It long was said that, although the British won the war, they lost the peace. Boer heroes of the war came into the elected government and into the cabinet and South African prime minister's office. In the first decades, forward-thinking, enlightened men, such as Jan Smuts (a former Boer general) and Louis Botha seemed to be leading the colony to genuine reconciliation. In the Great War, some Boer veterans even fought in British uniforms, rising to commands on the Western Front.

But the hardline Boers were unforgiving and unwilling to forget. After 1924, the reactionary Hertzog administration began to further restrict black rights and expand white privileges—relying on the Boer majority to back him against the British minority. The legislation passed in Capetown prior to World War II set the stage for the tragedy of the Apartheid system that would be formalized in the post-war years.

During the final years of the freedom struggle, the white hardliners were almost all Afrikaners—the descendants of the Boers—while more liberal views were espoused by a substantial portion of the English-speaking community (who did not lack prejudice, but whose prejudices were more benign).

Right through the 1980s, the Afrikaners lived in a myth of themselves, of past heroism and hardship—and eventual triumph. They felt their language, their way of life and even their religion threatened. And, unlike so many whites in colonies established later in the imperial age, the Afrikaners had been on the land for three and a half centuries. It was their home—not their colony, but their country.

They resisted to a very bitter end.

If you go to Pretoria today, you can visit the Voortrekker Monument on a hilltop just outside of the city. It remains a place of pilgrimage for Afrikaans speakers. Built on the eve of World War II, its architecture has the grandiosity and heaviness favored by the fascists in Europe. It is solid as a fortress, and ugly. But its appearance as a huge blockhouse suits the history of the people: Always embattled.

It is a mark of the wisdom of Nelson Mandela (and his key associates, such the late Walter Sisulu) that the monument was not dismantled or profaned after the fall of the Apartheid government. Although many of the displays are one-sided, even offensive to non-Boers, Mandela saw that there was no point in attacking a cherished symbol that belonged to the past and would have no effect on the future. His efforts to make South Africa a true home for all its people meant indulging the Afrikaners on this and a few other points. But those who value the monument most belong to yesterday.

Many Afrikaners have found their way in the new South Africa—although a curious statistic is that Afrikaans speaking women have fared better than the men, who lost many of their automatic privileges and lack competitive skills (not least a solid command of English). But the Afrikaners will find their way forward, in the spirit of their ancestors. And for those who do not want to integrate fully, there are still pockets of overwhelmingly Afrikaans-speaking residents, a few in the north, but many in the Cape.

If you visit South Africa and stop by the winelands outside of Capetown (perhaps the most beautiful wine country in the world), you will find Dutch town names, Dutch names in the phone book, Dutch architecture harking back three centuries, and Dutch traditions.

Stellenbosch is, at its core, a white-washed town of gabled roofs more reminiscent of Holland than of Africa, and its university still relies heavily on instruction in Afrikaans (to the misfortune of its students when they try to compete internationally). Blacks have equal rights now—but the town remains overwhelmingly white, self-segregated, except on the outskirts, where the black vineyard workers live in clusters of small houses or shanties. While in Johannesburg, the restaurant crowds are thoroughly mixed now, at least in the middle-class establishments and better, in Stellenbosch the faces in the dining rooms remain overwhelmingly white—even the wait-staffs are white. Of course, the great change is hardly a decade old, and social integration is going to take time. The Afrikaners need to break free of many a remaining prejudice (to be fair, many have). The younger generation likely will move forward at least part of the way—although not so quickly as in the English-speaking areas. In a literal sense, South Africa today remains a nation of tribes—including its white tribes—each with cherished homelands.

What is perhaps most striking to a visiting outsider is the enduring power of the Dutch Reformed Church. Anyone who wants to understand South Africa should stop by a rural church or one of the white-washed churches in a small town with a Dutch name on a quiet weekday morning. An old member of the congregation will be in attendance, looking after things. After a bit of sizing you up, he or she will tell you the history of the church—of its people—going back generation after generation. You may be invited into the sacristy, to look at an old Bible and the portraits lining the walls, the stern faces of pastors going back past the age of photography to the days of traveling country painters. Some of the volunteers don't speak English, but German will let you understand a good deal. And, once the ice is broken, they all want to tell their stories, feeling forgotten by the world, abandoned by history—still quietly under siege. Their church remains strong, a unifying refuge. The tone of the sermons has changed to suit the different political environment. But the faith that led men and women through the mountains and across deserts remains. It is powerful, intense and palpable even when the churches are empty.

The only other country I know where the churches, whatever the color of their congregants, are so crowded on a Sunday morning is the United States. The South African national anthem today is "God Bless Africa." It's deeply moving, more a hymn than a mere song. The land between the Cape of Good Hope and the Limpopo River, with its remarkable variety and haunting beauty, long has been Cain and Abel country. It remains to be seen whether or not its people can move forward to build a new Jerusalem. But anyone who dismisses South Africa's importance—and its chances—is a fool.

Conclusion: Where to begin?

South Africa has tremendous strategic potential, despite its very real and discouraging problems. The continent's general underdevelopment (and South Africa's uneven development) too often leads to the facile conclusion that it's "hopeless," or just not worth our attention. But that very underdevelopment and the glaring needs mean opportunity. Despite its powerful tribal traditions, Africa is not locked into irreversible patterns, as is the Arab world or, in a very different way, even China. Africa can change and needs to change, but will need outside engagement to change constructively. In the wake of the colonial era, outside assistance and a foreign presence can be very sensitive, of course. But rising generation's of Africans *want* change. They are tired of the grand rhetoric and slight results, of the cult of the strongman and the suffering of the little man. In that respect, South Africa, if it continues to make progress, can offer an example of an African state that works, that doesn't need a dictator, that won't collapse inevitably into civil strife.

A continent is at stake. It is deeply in American interests for South Africa to succeed. It is also in our interests to develop a network of ties, of modalities, through which we can patiently develop the sort of mutually-beneficial relationship that should be so natural between our two countries. Certainly, the South Africans need to jettison the last of their 20th century revolutionary rhetoric. But it's on the way out. In all my discussions in South Africa, I only encountered a single person (of any color) who was hopelessly hostile to the United States—and she clearly suffered from personal problems of continental dimensions. Rather, beyond a shred of liberation rhetoric here and there, there was great awe of and curiosity about the United States among the black majority (moreso than among Afrikaans speakers). If we find ways to work past the political gatekeepers, our two multi-racial societies are a natural fit.

And South Africa is, indeed, likely to be the major strategic player on the continent. Nigeria is more populous, but the Nigerians have made themselves hated for their arrogance; they are immeasurably corrupt; and Nigeria's internal problems will continue to prevent it from taking a leadership role for the rest of Africa. South Africa not only has the best hand, it has more chips to play.

Africa should be of special interest to the Marine Corps, since the crucial areas of the continent are its littorals. The heart of the continent (Conrad's "Heart of Darkness") along the middle and upper reaches of the Congo and in adjacent countries may be nearly as hopeless as pessimists declare it—at least well into the out-years. But the most encouraging developments, the clearest potential, and the practical power lie with the coastal states. The interior has resources, but cannot develop them under present conditions. By contrast, Africa's settled areas within a few dozen or, at most, a few hundred miles of its coasts are the areas where progress is already being made, from Luanda in the west, to Maputo in the east.

Should the United States decide to intensify its engagement with Africa, a triangulation approach makes the most obvious sense. South Africa is the

indispensible—*indispensable*—base of that triangle, the entry point to the southern portion of the continent and beyond. In time, the power grouping centered on South Africa will embrace both Mozambique and Angola (both formerly Portuguese colonies). South Africa's sphere of influence already incorporates Namibia—and, of course, landlocked states, such as Botswana. South Africans, primarily in business, but, increasingly, in military uniforms, are already engaged much farther afield, as described above. Pretoria will be the major player—barring catastrophic internal developments.

The northeastern lodgement of the strategic triangle would include Kenya, Tanzania and Djibouti on the coast, perhaps Eritrea, in time, and possibly Uganda in the interior. Rwanda, the new Prussia of east-central Africa, is too deeply embroiled in local struggles to be a useful ally for the present.

The western tip of the triangle would be the most problematic in which to establish a useful foothold. But it may be a more promising situation than it appears at first glance. While some of the English-speaking states, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, are tragically broken—and Nigeria is a long way from being a reliable ally to anyone (indeed, a devastating civil war might require USMC operations to secure coastal oilfields and Western expatriates)—but the language issue obscures the real realms of opportunity: Francophone Africa.

France has played out its hand in Africa. Paris has actively backed not just one too many, but many too many, local dictators and strongmen. Native populations have lost patience with the French. States such as Ivory Coast and Senegal, among others, may be better fits as regional U.S. allies than those with which we have traditionally maintained some form of relationship.

A window of opportunity has formed—and, for the foreseeable future, it may continue to widen. The current French decision to lead the “peacekeeping” effort in the Congo has nothing to do with humanitarian concerns—the French do not care how many black Africans kill other black Africans (although they would much prefer “their” Africans to do the killing, rather than the dying). The French are desperately trying to revive their traditional sphere of influence—and the Congo, although Belgian, was French-speaking (at least among the urban elites). Since independence, the French played a military role in the country that left the Belgians in the shadows.

France sees the United States becoming ever more powerful around the world and cannot free itself of 19th century, great-power-politics thinking. The French appetite for influence in Africa is almost irrational—emotional, above all. Paris retains a colonial mentality that persists beyond the loss of formal colonies. And President Chirac's invitation to Robert Mugabe to visit Paris for a recent conference, although utterly counter-productive, was a clumsy attempt to expand French influence into English-speaking Africa.

France is playing a game it cannot afford, cannot win, and no longer understands. The United States should rigorously avoid joint military missions with the French in Africa, and should avoid any logistics, intelligence or transportation support to French operations. Above all, should any French intervention turn into a disaster for the forces involved, the United States must not ride to the rescue—first, because we would then be seen as backing the French, rather than black Africans (no matter how vicious the native elements involved), and, second, because the French government and public need to experience the cost of the government's ill-conceived game. The French are not our

allies in Africa, they are our opponents. They recognize it clearly, though we have failed to do so.

The African understanding of what the French are about is much more sophisticated than we generally realize. There is an element of latent racism in our attitude still, an assumption that the Africans cannot see the strategic implications. But they see them more clearly than we do. The French are as bankrupt in Africa as their pension system is in France. Now they're just trying to rob the African bank. Beyond purely humanitarian missions, we should not cooperate with the French in Africa to any extent, whatsoever.

By developing strategic "lodgements" in the key littoral states—not a military presence in most cases, but a tradition of cooperation and incisive development support—we can help ourselves and help a continent. Whoever controls the littoral controls the key aspects of the interior, when necessary. And the littoral cities are the most amenable to progress and development, which can then spread inland over the decades.

If we only learn to see Africa with new eyes, discarding the traditional wisdom and our old prejudices, we would see a continent full of opportunities—despite its countless problems. It is a natural sphere of cooperation and constructive influence for the United States.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Conduct a closed-door, highly selective one-day symposium focusing on Africa's *positive* potential. Limit the size of the initial group to not more than twenty-five. Invite a mix of former attaches with African service, non-governmental organization veterans, strategists, desk officers, academics (to be carefully selected) and, if available, a representative from the Centers for Disease Control and at least one trade official or business person who has experience in dealing with Africa. The discussion should be unclassified, although the resulting report might merit classification, if its conclusions appear operationally incisive or particularly controversial. The goal would be to think beyond the traditional wisdom regarding Africa and to identify at least a few general concepts for engagement and alternative (positive) scenarios for sub-Saharan Africa. It should be a no-holds-barred, non-attribution, everything-stays-in-this-room discussion. In general, this writer does not recommend symposia or conferences, believing most of them to be a waste of time; however, in this instance, where so little thought has been applied and so much potential may exist, I believe that an initial discussion may prove so stimulating and promising that a series of low-profile, small-scale meeting on specific ideas, countries or initiatives may be merited. It cannot be stressed too strongly that this should not be a publicized effort. The purpose is to begin working toward a possible "game plan" for stepped up engagement in Africa.

2. Request that DIA task our defense attaches in each sub-Saharan state to identify key figures among the younger generation of politicians, businessmen and military officers who are most likely to lead the government or shape opinion across the coming generation. Attaches must understand that this is not a strictly military matter, and that they should consider the broadest possible range of figures, asking advice of both their embassy peers and local contacts. An integrated data base should be compiled, studied and updated annually. It is especially important to identify cross-border, regional networking among Africa's leaders of tomorrow. Some of the potential leaders will die of AIDS or otherwise fall by the wayside. But we must move beyond focusing on the leaders of today in single countries and begin to cross-reference the continent. The relationships between leaders of the freedom-struggle generations are sometimes obvious (at least in their broadest dimensions), but relationships between future leaders may be more subtle and difficult to assess. The time to begin those assessments is now. There is little we can do to re-shape the thinking of those in their seventies or eighties, but a great deal we can do to build relationships with men and women in their twenties or thirties—who the Department of State dismiss because of their lack of present, immediate importance and influence.

3. CETO should consider commissioning a study of alternative and unexpected outcomes that followed major historical epidemics. If funding were available, two to four competing (small-scale) studies should be commissioned. This initiative might prove extraordinarily revealing—not only as regards the potential effects of AIDS over the longer term in Africa and elsewhere, but in the event of the advent of new, deadly epidemic diseases or a biological warfare disaster. To give some sense of how important it is to explore these alternative outcomes, consider that, in advance of the attacks on the US on 9/11/01, numerous experts had predicted major terrorist attacks on our soil—even on lower Manhattan, in one case—but not one authority remotely foresaw the complex repercussions, from the enormous financial losses that resulted from an aggravation of the stock market decline and a crisis of business confidence, through changes in consumer buying patterns, to the actual cost of the damage done and rebuilding. Certainly, none of those who accurately predicted a terrorist strike on the US foresaw the profound change that would result in the attitude of the American people—or that the United States military would swiftly become involved in global operations against terrorism and a succession of innovative wars, with over a hundred thousand of our troops currently occupying Iraq (and likely to remain there for some time). We all thought small, and thought in traditional frame-works. But AIDS is an enormous plague whose damages go far beyond that of terrorism—and, just as 9/11 had unexpected positive results for the United States, we must ask, seriously, what unanticipated or non-linear results might follow in the wake of AIDS (and other possible epidemics).

4. Within the USMC system, conduct a closed-door “war-game” with limited players to explore a plan of strategic engagement with Africa, focusing on the potential for regional alliance building and the opportunities offered by the ending of civil wars and liberation struggles in various countries, as well as by the current French crisis of influence in Africa.
5. Study sub-Saharan Africa’s littoral countries as strategic clusters, focusing initially on South Africa and its neighbors, on east African and Horn of Africa littoral states, and on the most stable West African countries or on those in which present instability might ultimately work to the advantage of the United States.
6. Explore avenues to slowly, methodically and non-threateningly enhance strategic and practical cooperation with South Africa. If there is one firm conviction the author of this report has to offer it is that South Africa is, far and away, the most important sub-Saharan African state, as well as the most hopeful (despite profound problems) and the best suited for an eventual close alliance with the United States.
7. Zimbabwe does not figure in the recommendations because there is little the United States military can do, at present. Any attempt to intervene, no matter how justified morally and how welcome to the people of Zimbabwe, would alienate South Africa and other southern African states to a degree that might prove irreparable. If a British Commonwealth force is required to intervene in the future, we can support it with logistics and intelligence, but should avoid placing troops on the ground except, eventually, as peacekeepers in limited numbers. But we cannot be seen as post-colonial military interventionists in southern Africa at this time.
8. When faced with French requests for support for their African military adventures, responsible military officers should consistently make the case that such support would be inimical to US interests. Every French misstep, loss or failure in Africa is a potential American gain. Once, the French were feared and, however grudgingly, admired in Africa. Now they are no longer admired and much less feared. Increasingly, they are hated. We should take pains to be seen as an alternative to the French, not as their neo-colonial supporters.
9. Watch the presidential succession in South Africa closely. If Mbeki is followed by a technocrat, the country’s progress likely will accelerate. If he is followed by a demagogue, South Africa may, after all, become another failed African state. At present, Mandela is such a voice of authority that he can single-handedly prevent the election of a dangerous demagogue—a good hater. But Mandela is a

former long-term prisoner now in his eighties. Post-Mandela South Africa may face a crisis of confidence when it has to make key political decisions “on its own.”

10. If South Africa eventually offers a peacekeeping contingent for Iraq, welcome it. Take special care to facilitate cooperation and to expose the contingent’s members to both the full range of U.S. capabilities and the decency of U.S. military behavior—in contrast to the images often still prevalent in the developing world. Ties built in the field will be of greater benefit than those built in military training exchanges or through military-diplomatic channels.
11. If, at any point, a U.S. officer falls into the habit of gravitating toward white South African military officers, rather than maintaining balanced dealings with the full range of South African officers (no matter how exasperating individuals may be), remove him or her immediately. There are no “after hours.” Socializing exclusively with white officers, either in the field or in South Africa, is an unacceptable message for the U.S. military to send.
12. Never overreact to needling or insults from South African (or any African) military officers. It’s only a sign of insecurity and self-doubt. Be the bigger soul. You may not win over the officer involved, but you will impress his peers.

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